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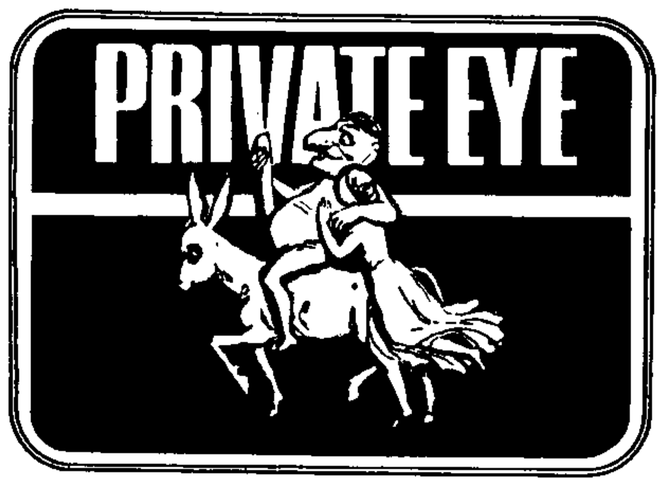

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THE MITTAL WAY

TONY BLAIR's government has told so many lies about the cash for steelworks affair that hacks are understandably confused. Which may be why they have overlooked one aspect of this sordid episode: the parlous financial state of the steel empire owned by Labour donor Lakshmi Mittal...

● *See Mittal: The financial lie, page 6*

THE very same week that Cornish accountant John Stuart Condliffe sent a grovelling letter to the *Eye*, begging to be let off the £100,000 he was ordered to pay when his stupendously expensive libel action against this magazine collapsed (see *Eye 1048*), he wrote to one of his clients threatening legal action if his own massive bill was not paid within seven days.

Shameless Condliffe charged Alison and John Bennett, who keep the village shop in Pendean near Penzance, £1,500 for their first year's accounts, despite the fact that they maintain their records on a Sage accounting computer system and had provided him with information that could be easily audited.

The Bennetts decided to move their business elsewhere and approached another local accountant who gave them an estimate of £750 for their yearly accounts, half what Condliffe had charged them. When Condliffe discovered that they were planning to switch accountants, he demanded they pay him by cheque and refused to hand over their draft accounts until the cheque had cleared.

John Bennett has offered in writing to hand over the £1,500 in cash in a straight swap for the draft accounts, but Condliffe has not yet replied to this offer. Condliffe may rest assured that the *Eye* will take into account his behaviour towards his clients when considering his plea for clemency.

MORE news on the amazingly high fees of libel specialist Peter Carter-Ruck and Partners. In *Eye 1048* we reported that at a hearing in January Carter-Ruck claimed to be owed more than £243,000 in costs for an action settled out of court. Mr Justice Gray, who was hearing the case, said the figure appeared to him "astonishingly high" and reduced the amount to £50,000.

Gray is not the first among his distinguished brethren to come to such a conclusion. In October 1999 Mr Justice Morland described Carter-Ruck's bill of nearly £20,000 for a half day hearing in a libel action where the firm acted for American tycoon Victor Kiam against the *Mirror* as "grossly extravagant" and said he was "staggered" by the sum.

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"I think we've reached the limit of soundbite politics."

— Peter Mandelson, crown prince of soundbite politics, Marketing, 28 February.

THOUGH Allan Leighton, interim chairman of Consignia, says "cash is heading south at a fast rate", trade minister Douglas Alexander has decided to throw yet more money at the executives of what used to be the post office.

Last month he appointed David Mills, former general manager of personal banking at HSBC Midland, to the board of Post Office Counters on a whopping £250,000 a year, starting in April.

This is more than any existing board member earns and more than 15 times the wage of a humble postie. A new post has been created for Mills – that of "chief executive officer of the post office" – which is quite different, apparently, to the post of chief executive officer of Consignia currently held by John Roberts (who earns £205,000 a year and presumably has no interest in post offices).

However, Mills' record for fairness to customers does not inspire confidence. During his regime HSBC Midland tried to stick to the hated cash machine charges. And Mills outraged mortgage holders when the banking ombudsman found that his bank's policy of giving new customers cheaper mortgages than existing borrowers was unfair.

NORMAN LAMONT
Entertaining singer-songwriter.
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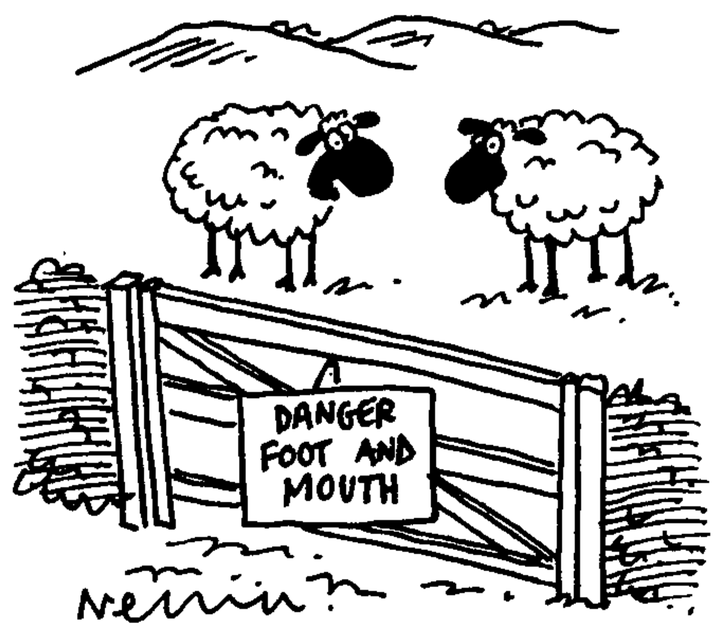
Metro

MORE on Capita, the company which, despite its lamentable record as a private provider of services (see Eyes passim ad nauseam), is poised to profit from London mayor Ken Livingstone's congestion charging scheme.

His plan, involving a ring of 700 surveillance cameras around central London, number plate scanning and punitive fines, will be administered by Crapita, whose tentacles are now reaching out to the BBC as well.

Soon Crapita will take over running BBC TV's poll tax-style licensing service, replacing Consignia at a cost of up to £500m over the next 10 years, excluding performance-related bonuses.

If the traffic scheme works, up to 40 percent of the congestion fees raised will go in administration costs. Seems Crapita is going from strength to strength.



"It's a shame Peter Mandelson just won't go away"

"Can't talk now, I'm chatting"

NEWS

THE last time the alleged Scottish National Liberation Army was in the news, the *Eye* suggested Scotland Yard should simply ask the Garda to arrange for Adam Busby's dole money to be cut off. Busby, who is now in his early 50s and hasn't worked for decades, runs the SNLA (membership at least two, but certainly less than half a dozen) from a bedsit in Dublin.

In the past the Guarda took Busby seriously enough to pull him in from time to time for sending threatening messages to the media. He even served a brief-ish prison sentence in Ireland (where he was ignored by fellow inmates in proper terrorist organisations). But two years ago the Garda decided not to get involved after a Dublin cybercafé was used to download maps of English waterworks from the internet. These were then sent to the media marked Top Secret, with a note saying that drums of poison had been introduced to these hush-hush locations. They hadn't.

The most interesting element of the current caustic-soda-in-a-Jiffy-bag invasion, however, is that the conduit for the SNLA's apparent claim of responsibility was the *News of the World*'s office in Glasgow. This is one bizarre side effect of Rupert Murdoch's decision (between elections) to pander to extreme Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalism via the columns of the *Screws* to try to build sales.

Busby and his few friends now regard the *NoW* as the media outlet most sympathetic to their aims. But many *Screws* readers in Northern Ireland will have been shocked to see the paper using its front page and leader column to endorse Johnny "Mad Dog" Adair, the well known mass murderer and canine lover, and his putative candidacy for election.

Having survived assassination attempts, killed loads of people, built a substantial drugs empire and been jailed for directing terrorism, following the Good Friday agreement Adair announced that he was a pacifist. His release from prison was violent and shortlived (Peter Mandelson had him sent back), but he becomes eligible for release in May. Again he is claiming to be a softy and says he'll eventually stand for election.

In the *NoW* leader, readers were reassured that Adair was perfectly respectable: "There will no doubt be widespread revulsion at the prospect... but that would be the wrong reaction to news of Adair's plans... Adair will learn the ballot box is stronger and more important than the barrel of a gun."

This is bollocks and, despite the *Guardian*'s on-off flirtation with republicanism and the pathetic Ulster edition of the *Star* co-published by Richard Desmond and Tony O'Reilly, it is the furthest any newspaper has ever gone to endorsing terrorism.

Street of Shame

SINCE no one at the *Times* knows anything about new editor Robert Thomson – an Australian who apparently bonded with the Dirty Digger because they both have Chinese wives – nervous Wapping hacks have been studying other papers' profiles in search of clues.

Alas, they are still none the wiser. For example, some media pundits confidently assert that Thomson supports the euro, while others insist he is against it. To try to settle the matter a hack accosted Thomson at a party last week and asked which version was correct.

"Perhaps they both are," the enigmatic editor replied.

WITH disarming honesty, *Sunday Times* business editor Rory Godson writes that "it is difficult writing about any business which touches on the affairs of News Corporation, ultimate owner of this newspaper, or Rupert Murdoch, its chairman."

But Godson's frankness about potential conflicts of interest doesn't appear to extend to the affairs of Allied Irish Banks (AIB). In recent weeks he has written many articles about the antics of rogue trader John Rusnak, who managed to lose £530m for an American subsidiary of AIB in a series of disastrous foreign exchange deals. Unlike other reporters on the story, however, he doesn't believe that boardroom heads will or should roll.

On 24 February, he complained that the *Financial Times* had "ruined breakfast for Michael Buckley, the AIB boss, by leading the front page with the claim: 'Pressure mounts on AIB head to resign.'" Not so, according to Godson: "AIB has moved with commendable speed to assure the market that the most thorough of investigations is taking place... It seems somewhat implausible that shareholders would demand Buckley's resignation." He went on to demand that business hacks should examine their consciences: "Are we always fair? Do we think about the impact we have on the people we write about?"

In Godson's case, the answer to the latter question is undoubtedly yes: he is the nephew of Don Godson, a director of AIB and chairman of the bank's audit committee. Is it not "difficult" writing about a business involving one's uncle? Apparently not, to judge by the thousands of words Rory Godson has devoted to the subject. And, since he hasn't seen fit to declare the interest in any of his articles, we must assume that both Rory and *ST* editor John Witherow feel there's no need to do so.

FURTHER skirmishes in the porn-wars between Tony Blair's friend Richard Desmond, boss of Northern & Shell, and the former head of Desmond's smut empire Deric Botham, who has set up a rival top-shelf outfit called Sapphire Multi Media.

N&S alleges that Botham and his colleagues have a "stolen confidential database", so Sapphire's solicitors asked to see it – to which Des's lawyers replied that it was still being compiled. This has left Botham and Co puzzling over how they could have stolen something that didn't exist at the time of their employment by N&S – and, apparently, still doesn't.

Dirty Des's lawyers have now dragged Sapphire back into court to ask for more time to find the elusive secret information and database – a full eight weeks, in fact. Perhaps the information is so "confidential" no one at N&S can find it.

A BRIEF announcement appears in the *Financial Times*: "FT Group chief executive Stephen Hill is stepping aside from the day-to-day running of the business as he pursues a buy-out of the company's specialist finance magazines."

A fuller translation of this story might run as follows. Stephen "Slasher" Hill precipitates a financial crisis at the FT Group by wasting far too many gold doubloons on FT.com, then cannily jumps off his sinking ship and offers to buy the treasure which Pearson are going to have to sell off to pay for having spent so much on the website.

Nice work if you can get it...

"MORTGAGE Victims Find a Champion." Thus the glad tidings in the *Mail on Sunday* of 17 February, which revealed that borrowers caught in the row over dual mortgage rates at last had a knight in shining armour.

He was one Gareth Fatchett, a West Midlands solicitor who hoped to persuade about 3,000 borrowers to let him act for them, so that he could bring the building societies "to their knees". The newspaper encouraged readers to join the class action and gave an address for Fatchett c/o the *Mail* office. His only charge would be a £25 "processing fee" – plus, er, 20 percent of any settlement, which could turn the altruistic crusade into a nice little earner.

Curiously the *Mail* neglected to mention that Gareth – son of the late Labour minister Derek Fatchett – is currently being investigated by the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) for alleged gross breaches of professional conduct at his last firm, Armstrong Neal of Halesowen, West Midlands. He left Armstrong Neal at very short notice on 31 October 2000 and has since been the subject of six separate complaints to the OSS from his former partner and from former clients. The official sleuths are taking a particular interest in Fatchett's investment of clients' funds.

One can only pray that he is fully exonerated when the reports are completed later this year. Otherwise Associated Newspapers might be facing its own class action – from disgruntled readers who were foolish enough to trust the *Mail on Sunday*.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Milligan was plagued by ill-health in recent years, including liver failure. He was aghast to discover that he had become an institution, and he had a jaundiced view of the many awards struck in his honour."

— Brian Boyd, Irish Times, *28 February 2002.*

SIX weeks after sacking most of the hacks on *Sunday Business*, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill is advertising in *UK Press Gazette* for reporters to come and work for the paper, now renamed *The Business*.

In view of Brillo's legendary managerial expertise it is hard to believe that he could ever get anything wrong; but could this recruitment drive just possibly mean that he was mistaken in his blithe assumption that 10 reporters would be enough to produce an entire national newspaper?

"I've got Irritable Mail Syndrome".

MICHAEL "Hendo" Henderson, the *Daily Telegraph*'s eccentric, opera-loving cricket correspondent, has joined the *Daily Mail* as a "general feature writer", thus swelling the refugee-camp of displaced *Telegraph* persons who have found asylum in Lord Rothermere's sports department since the arrival of sports editor Colin Gibson 13 months ago.

Other recent fugitives from Conrad Black include Derek Lawrenson (golf), Matt Lawton (football), Dave Edwards (rugby) plus assistant sports editor Paul Newman and sports news editor Gerry Hayes. To make room for the new arrivals many of the old sports hacks have been forced out, including Nigel Clarke, Ken Lawrence, Stephen Baker, Neil Collins and Graham Hunter – all of which has kept managing editor Lawrie Sear busy negotiating pay-offs.

It has also engendered a certain amount of resentment. Talk of various factions threatening the sports desk secretary, breaking into one another's filing cabinets and accessing rivals' emails have been dismissed as, er, "completely true".

Although committed to her musical career – "I really enjoy the whole process of making music," she recently told me – Victoria [Beckham] remains the most famous and sought-after female celebrity in Britain; able, if she chooses, to divert her career into television or film with just one phone call.

MARTIN TOWNSEND
Sunday Express

Nominated by J. James.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

THE *Telegraph's* media diarist, the Minx, is scathing about the *Guardian's* claim that the *Reader's Digest* has "10 fact-checkers for the British edition alone".

"Actually… there are five," pointed out the Minx on 22 February. In the same day's diary the Minx alleged that "the *Times* columnist and former obituaries editor Anthony Sampson" recently received a dressing down from departing editor Peter Stothard for publicly criticising the paper's decision to expand its obituaries across two pages.

Presumably the Minx meant to say former *Times* obituaries editor Anthony Howard. Can't they afford any fact-checkers on the *Torygraph* these days?

THE great Kylie Minogue bottom debate was of no interest whatsoever to *Mail on Sunday* columnist Suzanne Moore.

"I can't pretend to know or care if Kylie has had her bottom 'lifted'" wrote Moore on 3 March. "Does anyone else? Isn't it all just a silly excuse (if we need one) to look up her skirt?"

In answer to Moore's question her column is illustrated by… a big close up of Kylie's rear.

HACKWATCH
Spectator Sports

THE STORY SO FAR: Petronella "Petsy" Wyatt and Boris Johnson MP both work for the *Spectator*. And er, that's it. Yet for some mysterious reason these two Tory hacks are suddenly the focus of intense media curiosity. NOW READ ON…

7 February: In the *Daily Telegraph*, Boris gives his verdict on biology teacher Amy Gehring, who has been acquitted of indecent assault on teenage schoolboys: "Phwoar!" He confesses to feeling "whimpering envy" for the male adolescents of Surrey who had the benefit of Ms Gehring's "practical instruction" in biology. "If that was rape, I don't think I would have objected."

8 February: *Daily Mail* diarist Ephraim Hardcastle (aka Peter McHackey) is shocked by Boris's salacious remarks about Amy Gehring. "Father of four Boris," he opines, "may be influenced unduly in his libertarian atitudes to sex by freethinking Petronella Wyatt, daughter of the late Tote boss Lord (Woodrow) Wyatt, with whom he works closely at the *Spectator*".

9 February: In her *Spectator* column, Wyatt seeks to reassure men who fret about female orgasms. "Most women I know don't bother about orgasms at all," she reveals. "Nothing – not even the prospect of death – fills a man with greater horror than the suspicion that a woman has faked her orgasm. Well, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. There is no mystery about it. It is like the weather. Sometimes it rains and sometimes it doesn't. And if it doesn't one gets a watering can and waters the flowers oneself. Do the flowers ask if the rain is faked? Certainly not. So why should men?"

10 February: "Boris Johnson is in trouble over Ugandan affairs," Jasper Gerard writes in the *Sunday Times*. "Before he worries I am disclosing anything indelicate, I should explain that Bozza was off in Uganda a couple of weeks back on an International Parliamentary Union trip when, Labour MPs grumble, he should have been sitting in committee…"

13 February: In the London *Evening Standard*, Melanie Mcdonagh sends "my Valentine wishes, via this column, to those men for whom I have long nursed tender, unspoken and respectful sentiments". Such as? "Mr Boris Johnson, MP for Henley, whose P.G. Wodehouse charm is all his own, and, being married, probably doesn't expect a Valentine from anyone but his wife."

21 February: In the *Daily Telegraph*, Sarah Sands reveals that at lunch with a glamorous, high-powered female lawyer she was "transfixed" to notice her guest's husband – Boris Johnson – lunching at a neighbouring table. "The cult of London restaurants has produced a disastrous social incest," she remarks. "Networking is reduced to small, concentric circles in which everybody knows what everyone else is up to… Heaven knows what happens when people attempt affairs."

23 February: Having done orgasms – or, rather, not done them – Petsy Wyatt turns her attention to sexual infidelity. "A friend of mine was reading *Anna Karenina* recently and remarked that it was one of the great books on adultery as committed by a respectable female." Although she can think of other examples from French and Russian literature, where's the British equivalent? Could it be that Trollope and Dickens "disapproved of women, ah, expressing themselves? That for a respectable woman to commit adultery would indicate that she enjoyed sex, and that would never do?" Not until the 1960s, she claims, "were British women allowed to become sexual beings."

This prompts a further item from Peter McKay in the *Mail*. "What's got into elegant Petronella Wyatt?" he demands. "Goodness knows what her editor and friend, Tory MP Boris Johnson, 37, thinks about pouting Petronella as a sexual being." The London *Evening Standard* also notes Wyatt's interest in novels about adultery. "You needn't feel so downcast, Petsy," it advises. "Why not write the definitive adultery novel yourself?"

Meanwhile, in the *Telegraph*, there is a curious piece by Boris's deputy at the *Spectator*, Stuart Reid. "Now that Lent is here, one's thoughts turn to one's own failings, and, perhaps more keenly, to the failings of others," he observes, before ruminating on the morality of watching colleagues walking a tightrope. "It is apparently licit to enjoy high wire acts, provided that part of your enjoyment does not lie in the possibility that one of the acrobats might fall and injure himself, or worse. Ergo: no normal human may watch a high wire act without sinning. Something to consider when the circus comes to town."

25 February: Peter McHackey returns to his office after the weekend to find a message that was apparently left on the answering machine a couple of days earlier, following his latest article. "Er, McKay, um, Boris here, errm, well I mean, bloody hell… Put a bloody sock in it!"

In what? The Tory MP for Henley does not say. Perhaps we shall never know.

JUST FANCY THAT!

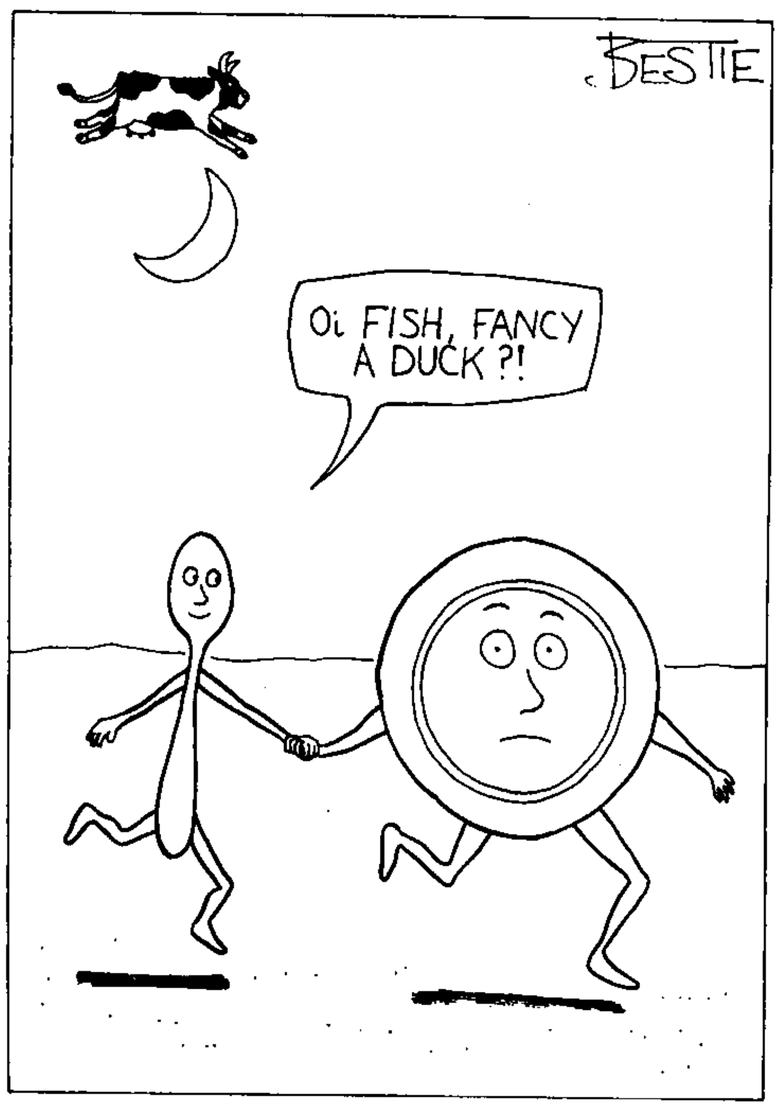
"These [the British curling team at the winter Olympics] are the best prepared set of curlers since Hilda Ogden went on a night out to the Winter Gardens with Stan."
— Ian Chadband, London Evening Standard, 4 February.

"The greatest curlers since Hilda Ogden."
— BBC commentator, 20 February.

"The Greatest Curlers Since Hilda Ogden."
— Mirror, 21 February.

THREE days before Joan Collins married youthful Peruvian Percy Gibson the wedding plans were still top secret, according to *Evening Standard* hackette Harriet Arkell. "The secret wedding plans of Joan Collins are keeping her busy with just days to go," wrote Ms Arkell. "The latest understanding of wedding guests is that her marriage… will take place on Sunday at a central London hotel…"

If only Ms Arkell had turned to page 27 of the same day's *Standard*, she might have had an exclusive. Explaining why he had not been invited to the wedding of his old friend, celebrity designer Nicky Haslam wrote: "It has been made clear to me that my presence at Claridge's at five o'clock on Sunday 17 February will not be required."



A SPOONERISM

IN THE TEAROOM

EARLY in the new year Nita Clark, the Number 10 apparatchik responsible for relations with the unions, sounded the alarm. Barbarians were at the gate. Dissatisfaction with pay and conditions among public sector workers had reached a point where union bosses were threatening to turn Tony Blair's second term into a rerun of Jim Callaghan's disastrous administration – winter of discontent and all.

Baroness Morgan was told to keep an eye on the developing danger. Since then there has been much talk of needing "a miners' strike". This phrase shouldn't be taken literally as there are too few coal miners around these days to raise a quorum for a ballot. Rather, it is political shorthand for a big political fight – and one that Tony Blair must win as publicly and decisively as Maggie did when she saw off Arthur Scargill.

The problem is that when they made King Arthur, they threw away the mould. Neither the NUT's Doug McEvoy, nor Aslef's Mick Rix, not even the RMT's feisty Bob Crowe can be cast as a plausible stage-villain. Yet with train drivers in the north demanding equal pay with train drivers in London (£30,000 a year and not a penny less) while teachers, nurses and police officers in the south east demand greater differentials with teachers, nurses and police officers elsewhere to offset higher housing costs, something has to be done.

It would all be so much simpler if we were at war. Public sympathy for "the wreckers" would soon evaporate as our home grown economic saboteurs were branded "Saddam's fifth column". Of course it would be verging on the cynical to suggest that our political masters would leap on to George W. Bush's gung-ho bandwagon just to settle a few scores with the unions. Not even a government that continues to retain the services of Stephen Byers could be quite so cold blooded. But we do live in times of "joined-up politics" where nothing is accidental. As the prime minister weighs the options he won't need a Jo Moore to plant the thought somewhere in the back of his mind that with a little help from Baghdad and Washington he might get his "miners' strike" after all.

'Urquhart'

"Your generation has no ideals"

LABOUR MPs who had to sit through a tedious session of business questions last week in order to be able to ask Robin Cook, the leader of the House, a question or two, are hopping mad with Peter Mandelson's queue-jumping.

Mandy put in an appearance at the beginning of the meeting to decide the order of business in the Commons the following week and then disappeared. Sauntering back some time later, he wandered over to the Speaker, and hey presto, the Prince of Darkness was immediately called, as his horny-handed colleagues still patiently awaited their turn.

Veteran Mandy haters have decided the next time he tries this, they will bar the door to the committee room.

MITTAL

The Financial Lie

TONY BLAIR's government has told so many lies about the cash for steelworks affair that hacks are understandably confused. Which may be why they have overlooked one aspect of this sordid episode: the parlous financial state of the steel empire owned by Labour donor Lakshmi Mittal.

Since Blair claims he was simply trying to help the poor Romanians by urging them to hand over the Sidex steel company to his friend Mittal, this deserves some scrutiny – especially as there was a solid alternative bid from the reputable French firm, Usinor.

Lakshmi Mittal seems to mix his private and his quoted business interests in a most confusing manner. In steel, some of his operations are owned privately (by LNM group), the bulk via Ispat NV, a company quoted in New York but which states openly in its accounts that its home country is the Netherlands. Visit www.lnmgroup.com and also www.ispat.com and it is soon apparent that the two operate almost as one. Were one company to falter the other would be in some trouble.

Ispat was floated in New York five years ago at $30 a share. Today its shares trade at $1.40. That means that a company which in 2000 produced 16 million tonnes of steel is valued at £117m. By contrast Corus (the former British Steel) produced 20 million tonnes of steel in 2000 but is valued at £2.5bn. While the British government may rate LNM/Ispat very highly, clearly this is not a view shared in financial markets: the share price screams out that something is very wrong at Ispat.

The most recent annual report for Ispat covers the year 2000. Quarterly reports for the first nine months of 2001 are also available and show that its financial position worsened considerably. But, being charitable, let us confine ourselves to the information that would have been available to Blair when he decided to back this company: the last annual report.

The company claimed to have net assets of $884m at 31 December 2000 (although within nine months Ispat says that this number had fallen to $604m). But even that $884m looks suspect thanks to a change in Ispat's accounting policy between 1998 and 2000 that reduced the rate at which it depreciated all its assets. The effect? To bolster profits and boost net assets. It now depreciates its plant and machinery at anything between three and 45 years – in 2000 the actual depreciation charge on such assets was just over 22 years.

At Corus, by contrast, plant and machinery are depreciated over a maximum of 15 years and in 2000 the actual average term was just over 10 years. Is it really credible that Ispat's machinery can last twice as long as that of Corus? Were Ispat to have adopted the same (undoubtedly more prudent) depreciation policies as Corus, it would almost certainly have had negative net assets by the end of 2000. By autumn 2001 it would definitely have owed more than it owned.

It does not end there. The Ispat balance sheet excludes: $124m of guarantees on loans made by Ispat's US subsidiary to other companies in which it had invested; lease commitments of $136m; and a whopping $1.6bn guarantee of debts racked up by Ispat subsidiaries. Be in no doubt: Ispat has had negative assets for quite some time. If you attempted to wind it up tomorrow, its creditors would be left whistling.

Of course a company or an individual can survive with negative net assets as long as they or it is generating enough cash to start to repair the holes in its balance sheet. Sadly that is not the case for Ispat. In 2000 it generated cash from operations of $381m. The company cut its capital expenditure on replacing old plant and machinery to just $184m – about half what it was two years previously. But despite slashing capital spending, Ispat did not have enough cash left to fund both its (abnormally low) tax bill of $20m and its financing costs of $216m. In other words, it had to borrow from Peter (the banks) to pay Paul (its interest bill to the banks).

It is clear that some of Ispat's bankers were worried as long ago as 2000. A note in the accounts for that year reveals that Ispat's largest subsidiary, its US arm, had breached its banking covenants (the minimum operational performance demanded by banks if they are not to have the right to call in loans). Amazingly the banks agreed that loans from Ispat NV to the US subsidiary could be treated as operating profits in order to keep it from breaching its covenants. By such a yardstick, even the millennium dome would have made a profit.

In short, by the time of the Romanian deal last year LNM/Ispat desperately needed the chance to buy some assets on the cheap, hopefully with funding provided by someone else, in order to generate some quick cash. It may just have found salvation with the purchase of Sidex with funds (thanks to HM government) largely provided by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

One would have thought that with all Mr Blair's accounting friends at Arthur Andersen he would have undertaken due diligence on LNM/Ispat before battling on its behalf. But it appears that the only sum which mattered in this affair was £125,000 – Mittal's cheque to "new" Labour.

PS: Labour party chairman Charles Clarke has said donors like Mittal give not in return for favours but because of "their desire to support democracy and because of their desire to promote the values of the party they support". One look at Mittal's operation in Kazakhstan shows how true this is.

Mittal bought Kazakhstan's massive steelworks in Termitau at a knock down price five years ago. His company Ispat is now the country's largest employer, owning the Sranskaya mine which supplies the steelworks, as well as the local power and TV stations. While Ispat has invested in the area (again with the help of EBRD and World Bank loans), it has still laid off miners.

Two years ago the Alliance of Independent Trade Unions launched protests and a strike in the mine. President Nursultan Nazarbaev's regime – known for its authoritarianism – launched a show trial to shut down the union. Very "new" Labour.

PPS: When the Haulbawline steel factory in Cork, owned by Mittal's company LNM, closed last June, Irish steel unions partly blamed Mittal's unwillingness to spend the £9m needed to bring the site up to European safety standards.

Interesting to note, then, that as part of LNM's deal to take over the Ispat-Sidex plant in Romania, the company has agreed to spend £54m ($76m) over five years to improve... environmental standards!

Number crunching

3

■ times MPs will have voted on fox-hunting since 1997

■ times Byers has faced serious calls to resign since 1997

THE biggest parliamentary scandal so far of the second Blair government – the sacking of Elizabeth Filkin as parliamentary standards commissioner – could not be discussed in parliament. So those few MPs who opposed the sacking had to speak up in a Commons debate on 13 February about the appointment of her successor.

The MPs who had the guts to make their voices heard were Peter Bottomley (Worthing West), David Winnick (Walsall North), Alan Williams (Swansea West), Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan), Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) and, most stridently, Brian Sedgemore (Hackney South and Shoreditch).

Sedgemore regretted the sacking of Mrs Filkin, whom he described as a "rough-hewn character, capable of fingering the collar of dodgy people who are self-serving and all too willing to kick up a fuss when the heat is on". He described her proposed successor Philip Mawer as "a member of the great and the good, an establishment figure". He concluded: "I doubt whether a sophisticated insider and dexterous mandarin who is capable of reading the tea leaves in this place is the sort of person we want."

Sedgemore was not impressed by the speech which opened the debate and which proposed Mr Mawer for the job. He described it as "unctuous". It was – and was made by Stuart Bell, Labour MP for Middlebrough "on behalf of the House of Commons Commission". He recommended his friend Philip Mawer, general secretary to the Synod of the Church of England, as the new standards commissioner. Mr Mawer, said Bell, was "a person of clear vision, absolute integrity and strong moral values". What he did not reveal (nor did anyone else in the debate) was that he and Mr Mawer had appeared twice in recent years before parliament's ecclesiastical committee (trying to expand the power of Bishops to sack churchwardens) and on both occasions had received from the committee a severe rebuff.

ONE Enron associate which has not yet come under scrutiny in the acres of press coverage of the downfall of the energy giant is lobbying firm Citigate Westminster, which listed Enron Europe as one of its leading clients in its February 2001 prospectus.

Citigate, like Enron, is a major Labour donor. It gave the party £16,161 last year alone. Its chairman, Labour peer Lord Faulkner of Worcester, is a longtime friend of Peter Mandelson who helped the former Northern Ireland minister set up the shadow communications agency in the mid-1980s, alongside advertising man turned pollster Philip Gould and then *Mirror*-man Alastair Campbell.

Faulkner was a key member of Neil Kinnock's team in the 1987 and 1992 general elections and more recently has sat on the government's working party on football-related disorder. Faulkner's fellow Citigate director Rex Osborn, meanwhile, worked closely with Mandelson for several years at Labour HQ, where he rose to become deputy director of campaigns before leaving to become a lobbyist in 1997.

ENVIRONMENT minister Michael Meacher is so worried about the ecological effects of high street goods he has just appointed some new members to his "advisory committee on consumer products and the environment".

Meacher has reason to worry. Every trip to shops like Boots, Sainsbury's or B&Q creates a swathe of plastic bags and packaging that will eventually end up in landfill sites. New consumer technologies like mobile phones bring new threats too: they give off radio pollution when in use and leach heavy metals into the ground when thrown away. So Meacher has had to think carefully about whom best to appoint to reduce this tide of polluting waste. His appointments include:

Alison Austin, senior manager in the quality and innovation group of Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd; Dr Phil Stubbs, head of group environment and safety at Boots the Chemists; and Dr Charlotte Grezo, director of corporate responsibility for mobile phone firm Vodafone, previously with that jolly green giant BP. They will work under existing committee chairman Dr Alan Knight OBE, head of social responsibility at Kingfisher plc, the firm that runs B&Q.

THE Liberal Democrats have been scathing in their criticism of the failed Individual Learning Account scheme which the government was forced to scrap last November after evidence of widespread abuse of the system.

At an education select committee hearing in January Lib Dem MP Paul Holmes said of the ill-fated ILAs: "The evidence we have been given today confirms that the government scheme is best summed up the words 'failure' and 'fraud'."

Holmes's damning words appear, however, to have eluded the authors of the Lib Dem's consultation paper on the reform of public services, launched by Charles Kennedy on 27 February. One of the "Issues to Consider" listed on the paper is: "Can the Individual Learning Account model be applied successfully in other aspects of the public services?"

'Backbiter'

Warballs

"Gravesham Council [in Kent] is blaming the 11 September terrorist attacks on America for a huge 24.5 per cent hike in council tax… Leader of the Labour group councillor Rosemary Leadley said: 'There is no doubt the events of 11 September have had a significant effect on our budget.'"

— Gravesham News Shopper, 20 February.

"The horrific terrorist attacks of 11 September in the US have really rammed home the importance of the task of storing and retrieving information. With information becoming the essential element of every business it has never been more important to examine your company's storage needs and capacity and study whether you are getting value for money. Book your 1-2-1 appointments for impartial advice with members of the Fibre Channel Industry Association Europe at networks telecom europe 2002 NOW!"

— Email circular from Jane Murphy, "portfolio director" of networks telecom.

"Remember 11 September. Considering what a cataclysm the events of 11 September were it is surprising that the philatelic fallout has been so sparse…"

— Email from stamp dealers Sandafayre.

Court Circular

PRINCESS MARGARET'S death has reopened the debate about the future of Kensington Palace.

The demise of its two most famous inmates – Diana and Mags – means the Kensington des res is now home to a clutch of minor royals, including the very minor Prince and Princess Michael of Kent who pay just £75 a week to live alongside royal retainers and senior flunkeys like Sir Michael Peat, Keeper of the Privy Purse.

Peat, who chaired the last review of the palace, is soon to become Charles's private secretary, so the next review is likely to fall to lord chamberlain Lord Luce. Brenda has already decided change is necessary, and there are three options.

First, with the number of grace and favour apartments being reduced in line with the last royal financial review, it would be possible to accommodate Kensington's current residents at St James's Palace, Marlborough House and in revamped accommodation behind the Royal Mews – though finding somewhere grand enough for Prince and Princess Pushy could be tricky.

The clear-out would allow Kensington Palace to be available for a fully commercial let, although the state apartments would remain open to the public. Buckingham Palace reckons this could bring in about £30m a year – as it happens, the approximate annual running cost of the monarchy.

However, being bold, financially astute and eminently sensible, the proposal is unlikely to win the day with Brenda's senior advisers. So a compromise is being advocated: a mix of commercial letting and accommodation for flunkeys. The third option is a modern, central London museum of royalty. Tourists currently fork out £8.80 to see the state rooms, but even more could be charged if more royal treasure and memorabilia were on display.

The decision ultimately rests with Brenda, who has moving plans of her own. She has told staff that on the death of the Queen Mother she would like to leave Buckingham Palace, which she detests, and return to Clarence House, where she and Philip lived happily before she became Queen.

'Flunkey'

TUC NEWS

DESPITE the name change, it was business as usual at the first meeting last month of the national executive council (NEC) of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF) section of Amicus, the newly-formed trade union.

Members of the London regional council were left in no doubt that they will continue to pay a heavy price for daring to attempt to enfranchise their members and suggesting that the leadership of the MSF under general secretary Roger Lyons – the man who put a 25p bun on his Amex card then claimed it back on expenses (*Eyes passim*) – was anything other than squeaky clean.

With legal costs and payouts to staff who tried to blow the whistle on financial impropriety by MSF chiefs having depleted union funds by £900,000 over the last two years, many rank-and-file members hoped the merger with the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) would witness an end to old animosities. No such luck.

Instead, the first meeting confirmed the suspension from office for a further four years of three elected officers of the London regional council (LRC): ex-president Dr Susan Michie; ex-treasurer David Beaumont; and ex-secretary Hugh MacGrillen – all of whom were suspended for various crimes against Lyons in November 1999.

David Beaumont, who set up an entertaining website (www.rogerlyons.com – put the sound on) detailing the failings of the MSF, was last week expelled from the union. He has been accused by Lyons of anti-semitism – because he used the *Fiddler on the Roof* hit "If I were a Rich Man" to accompany articles about financial impropriety in the MSF.

"Damn it, woman, how much moisturiser do you use?"

FYE TV

24 (BBC2)

ALTHOUGH the Oxford student Ms Chelsea Clinton has complained that she finds Britain anti-American, it's hard to see what more we could really do. Every street-corner here now features an American coffee franchise flogging the brown stuff at around six times the price a blighty bean-grinder ever managed. The year's biggest exhibition at Tate Britain – that's Tate Britain – is 19th century American landscape painting. And, on television, the only stuff that ever gets the executives and reviewers really excited is the buy-ins from the US networks.

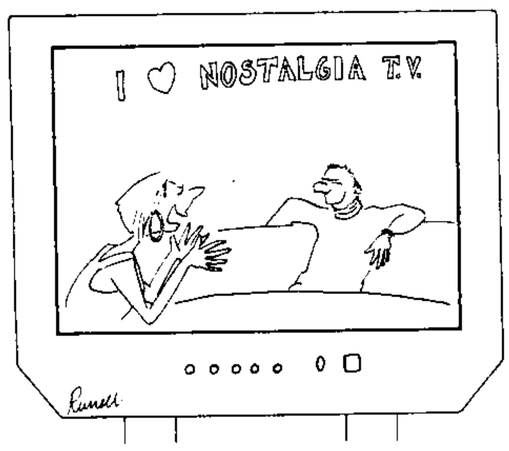
The latest is **24**, which was designed as the ultimate in high-concept drama. Fifteen years ago, American drama was all low-concept. *Seinfield* was really just a guy in an apartment, *Friends* just some folks in another one and *ER* yet another hospital show. What lifted these simple outlines was the admission of elements of the surreal or the fantastic and, in the case of *ER*, technical innovations involving camera-moves and live episodes.

The easiest way of being innovative is simply to reverse the existing conventions and so high-concept subsequently became the new low-concept. The *West Wing* started out as *Friends* set in the White House and, because American drama had become famous for following several plot-strands, *Murder One* concentrated exhaustively on a single investigation.

Then came *24*, which is one of those projects which goes downhill from the pitch. It consists of 24 episodes, each lasting one hour and each depicting the events of a single sixty-minute period between midnight on one day and midnight on the next so that the first episode is titled "midnight to 1am" and so on.

Some new shows are accused of already imagining themselves at the awards ceremony but *24* is even smugger than that, projecting itself ahead to the day when, for the 10th or 20th anniversary of the first transmission, a cable network runs all 24 episodes on the same day between midnight and midnight or, even more wackily, on two-dozen successive days but at the precise time-period depicted in the episode.

The problem is that, as often in high-concept drama, the structure is designed to distract from the content. The basic plot – an attempt to prevent an assassination threat against a presidential candidate – would serve as one of the five storylines in an hour of *The West Wing*. Here it's a single strand stretched over 24 weeks and so relies on



"So tell us, right, because you were actually there: What was it like being interviewed on this show yesterday?"

the dazzle of its narrative format to prevent us noticing the dullness of the surface.

Action which takes up more than half of episode two — FBI agent Keifer Sutherland and a buddy under fire in the stairwell of an office block – would be thought a terrible thriller cliché in a story told normally. Fearing that even the illusion of this siege taking place in real-time won't render it fresher, the producers introduce a second high-concept: split-screen, as seen in *The Thomas Crown Affair* and the recent TV series of Lynda La Plante. In this way, several second-hand thriller scenes can be played out simultaneously.

The whole thing is a con. Because the American TV hour, like the psychiatric one, lasts for only around 50 minutes, it really isn't happening in real-time at all. When the time-caption on screen reads 01:29:24, the clock on your video shows that only about twenty minutes have passed. Even the dialogue, for which American TV became famous, is lacking. "You two are toast," says one character, which is US Dialogue 101. And, because of the format, people have to do things at unlikely times. The assassin is practising with his gun at 2am, when a real hit-man would probably be getting a good night's sleep.

Like all imported American drama series, *24* will win tiny audiences in Britain but huge publicity and review coverage. This has always been the deal with these things. Shows such as *Seinfield* and *The West Wing* – coast-to-coast peaktime sensations in America – win BBC2 or C4 audiences of around a million in Britain.

The reason is that such drama series are made for Americans: watching episode two of *24*, you're supposed to know what the acronyms of various government organisations stand for. For a very small audience in this country, ignorance comes to feel like sophistication, although the dialogue is no more inventive than British lines about HRH or the RAC.

In the last two decades, imported American culture has benefited from a critical self-hatred in Britain. Book reviewers who would mock a novel in which nothing much happened in Wigan find in fiction depicting non-events in Nebraska or Winnipeg "the transcendence of the everyday". In the same way, *The West Wing* and *24* are over here and over-rated.

In television, it's all about to happen again. The next big thing after *24* was *Six Feet Under*, a sit-com set in an American funeral parlour created by the screenwriter of *American Beauty*. British executives have been fighting over it, as, in turn, will reviewers. But just imagine if one of our networks put out a new drama set at an undertakers in Salford: parochial, old hat, dead on arrival.

'Square Eyes'

GOING LIVE

REPORTING for BBC LDN on a Greenpeace occupation of an incinerator chimney, Gillian Joseph told viewers: "You can't see very much now because it's dark. But here are some pictures from today."

And when Helen Philpott of BBC Looks North reported on the arrest of Neil and Christine Hamilton's accuser, live from Gainsborough Police Station on 7 February, she admitted: "I can't tell you very much really. The police aren't saying anything to us and, anyway, the police station itself is closed."

MEDIA NEWS

SO Granada and Carlton's secret merger talks, prompted by forthcoming relaxation of ownership rules in the awaited communications bill, have at last collapsed.

Despite what the City might say, the core problem for both is the future of their unwatched pay-to-view albatross, ITV Digital, which to date has cost them £800m. So who is going to blink first and pull the plug on the channel?

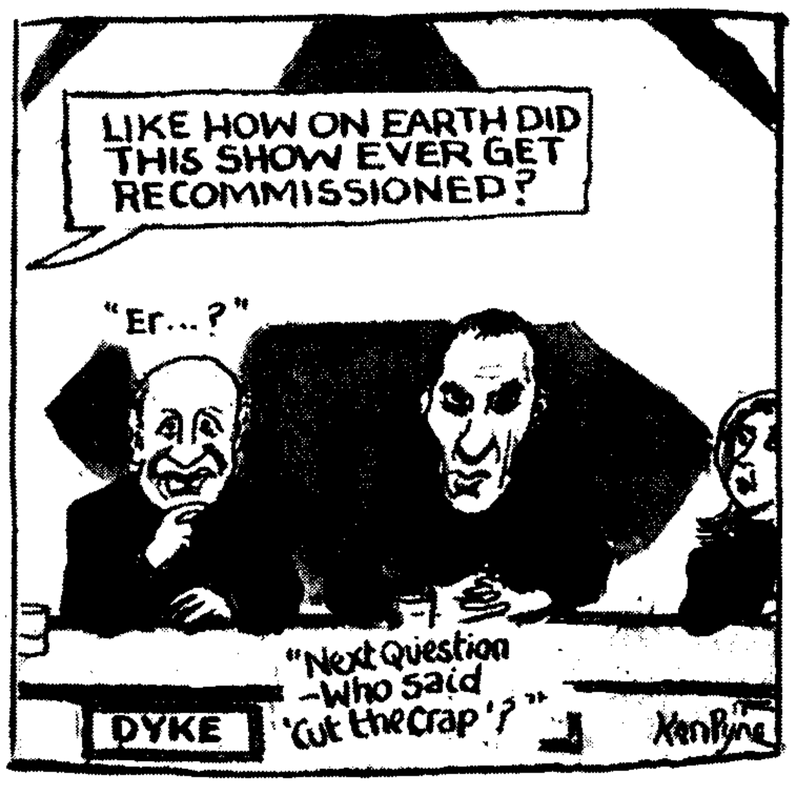
Carlton looks the likely executioner, if only because Bertelsmann, the German media empire that is keen to move into UK broadcasting by bidding for Carlton (benefiting Carlton's shareholders and making its executives millionaires), has made it clear it wants nothing to do with ITV Digital.

THE BBC's "diversity database", a collection of around 1,000 contacts designed "to improve our representation of people in our programmes", ie ethnic minorities, has finally come on line. In fact it contains a list of the same bores that already festers in producers' filofaxes.

Under "race relations", for example, are Keith Vaz and Lee Jasper. For the "police" you'll find Keith Vaz and Lee Jasper again, plus John Greive. Lee Jasper will also deliver soundbites on everything from "the black community" to the internet, while Vaz will lecture on everything from "inner cities" to Yemen and even Oman.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Sue Lawley said goodbye to Today listeners for the last time this morning."
— Guardian's email "Informer", 27 February.



MICHAEL WINNER, the man who put the sex in sexagenarian, was immensely proud of being invited to deliver a lecture in the debating chamber of the Oxford Union last week; so much so that he spent about £1,000 on a full-colour advert in the *Oxford Mail* urging people to attend.

Alas! Precisely eight people turned up. "Some of them felt a bit embarrassed and wandered into the bar," an Oxford Union spokesman said. "So we changed the venue to the [much smaller] Morris Room."

Nevertheless the tiny audience allegedly included some "genuine fans" who asked "lots of questions" about how on earth Michael created such imperishable cinematic masterpieces as *Death Wish* and *Dirty Weekend*.

DUMB AMERICA

The Weakest Link USA, BBC2

Anne Robinson: *Which island prison closed in 1963?*

Contestant: *Australia.*

AR: *Which breakfast pastry is named after the French for "shape of the waxing moon"?*

Contestant: *Pop Tart.*

AR: *Which former member of the House of Representatives died at the battle of the Alamo?*

Contestant: *Al Gore.*

AR: *What fountain pen takes its name from the highest mountain in the Alps?*

Contestant: *Pentel.*

Answers: *1. Alcatraz. 2. Croissant. 3. Davy Crockett. 4. Mont Blanc.*

NOTICING how well the technology sector is doing, legendary haberdasher Mohamed Fayed has expanded his internet operation with a "virtual" Harrods.

It features a link to a palatial new Harrods on-line casino which, contrary to Fayed's English heritage marketing angle, is based not in Knightsbridge but Costa Rica.

Presumably Fayed wasn't impressed by recent UK budget changes to encourage gambling sites to stay within the UK rather than relocate to foreign climes where they can avoid paying British taxes or attracting the attention of British regulatory bodies.

But he has chosen an odd time to expand in this way. The *New York Times* reported recently on "the growing number of credit card companies and banks that are refusing to process payments for Internet gambling... [because] customers frequently deny having placed bets or simply refuse to pay their credit card bills after running up large gambling debts". Many internet casinos in America have seen revenue fall by 30 percent, and "the liquidity crisis has already forced some operations to close".

Will anyone put money on the phoney pharaoh being more successful?

WINTER WEATHER BRINGS TRAVEL CHOAS

Teletext headline, 23 February

MODESTY BLAZE

"Joan wanted Shirley Bassey, Roger Moore, Tim Rice and Cilla Black, but not me. No offence to Cilla, but I'm just as big a star as her in the TV world and, unlike her, I have had Joan appear as a guest on one of my many TV shows. I really thought that Joan and I had hit if off."

— Esther Rantzen on not being invited to Joan Collins' wedding, the Daily Telegraph, *20 February.*

IT'S been a rough period for magazine publishers, but one seems to be hurting more than most. Take the following year-on-year declines, generously rounded down, from the latest ABC audit.

Home and Antiques – 6 percent; *Eve* – 7 percent; *Radio Times* – 5 percent; *Toybox* – 21 percent; *Tweenies* – 8 percent; *Teletubbies* – 3 percent; *Top Gear* – 10.7 percent; *Gardener's World* – 3 percent; *Top of the Pops* – 19 percent; *Star*, the celebrity magazine, axed.

All the titles, which benefit from endless radio and TV cross-promotion, are owned by BBC Worldwide, the Beeb's commercial wing. Worldwide is supposed to make kilos and kilos of money which is poured back into programme making... Oh dear.

OBN SPECIAL

BBC News Online's coverage on 10 February of Tony Blair's visit to Sierra Leone, penned by Nick Assinder, has already become a legend at White City.

Headlined "Blair's Missionary Zeal Confounds Critics", it reads: "It is impossible to stand next to Tony Blair... surrounded by the poorest and some of the most traumatised children in the world, and argue that it is wrong for him to have come to Africa". It goes on and on, but concludes that to say Blair is playing politics, as some did, "is frankly insulting". This is the firm view of the man colleagues have unkindly christened Nick Asslicker.

THE man in charge of organising the celebrations for the Queen's jubilee weekend is P&O chairman Lord Sterling.

The Tory peer was in charge of P&O at the time of the Zeebrugge ferry disaster in 1987. He was ennobled only weeks after the ferry company was charged with corporate manslaughter, although it was later let off. Just the man to oversee a disaster and charm a hostile media.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Alan Brazil: It was sad to hear this morning of the death of John Shaw.

Mike Parry: John Thaw, Alan.

Alan Brazil: Do you know, I keep getting his name wrong. John, if you're listening, sorry mate.

— Talk Sport, No-Nonsense Breakfast, *22 February 2002.*

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Injun Jo Moore

LUVVIES

"I don't like the words 'scene' and 'steal' in the same sentence," he says. "I know it's meant as a compliment, but it implies something that I hope I'm not and I hope I'll never become. For me, if acting is about anything, it's about generosity."

RHYS IFANS
The Independent on Sunday

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AD NAUSEAM

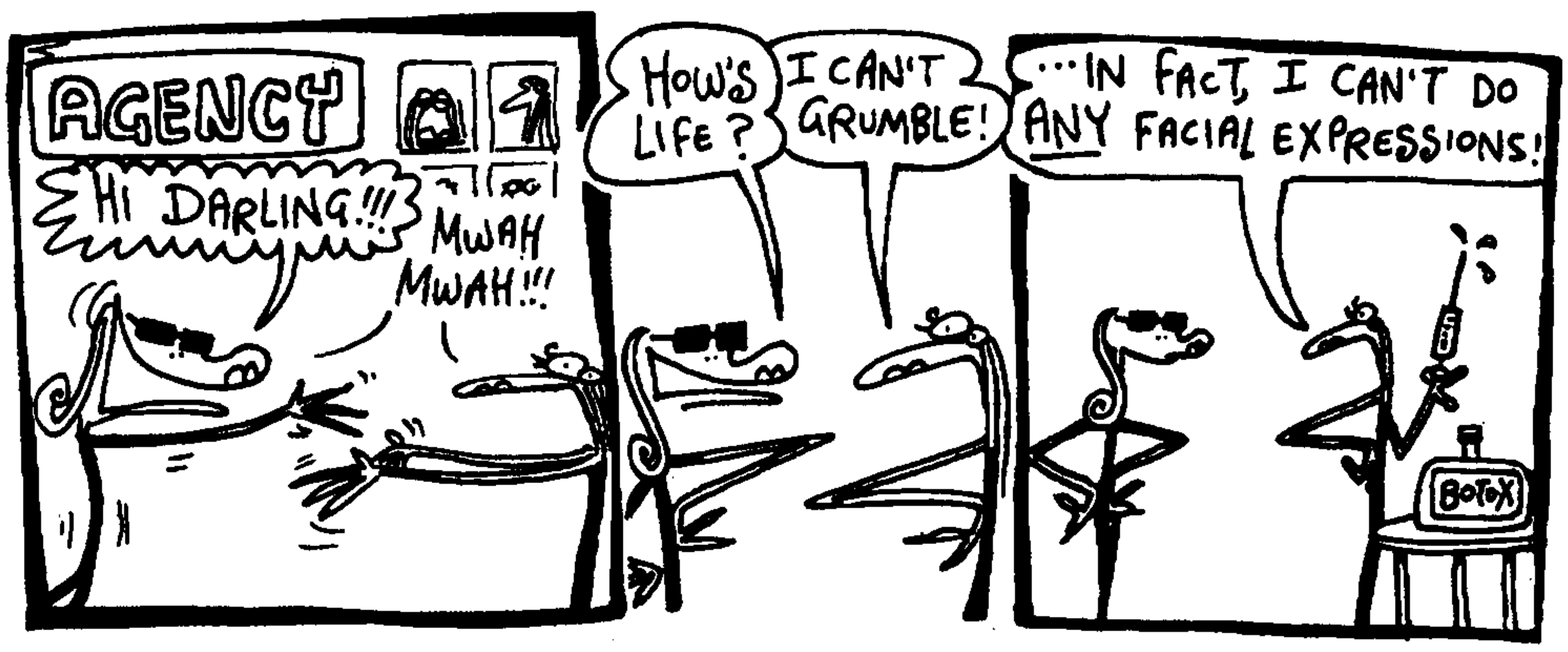
NOT content with closing the stable door once the horse has bolted, Eye-friend Andersen Consulting is trying to disguise the horse.

Only 12 months ago the Eye reported how it had spent the best part of $100m to rebrand itself as Accenture, in a move to distance itself from parent company Arthur Andersen. At the time the ads read "formerly Andersen Consulting", in case old clients were confused by the ludicrous new "wordmark", as it was termed.

Now the Enron scandal has come to light, Accenture is all too keen to airbrush Andersen from its history, and has just launched yet another branding campaign, splashing out a further $70m on a global media push through Young & Rubicam. It's based around the tag "I am your idea. Use me or lose me." As taglines go this is definitely more losable than usable, but this apart you may well ask why Accenture's $100m 2001 catchphrase has suddenly been binned. Probably because, post-Enron, last year's slogan takes on a certain ironic overtone. It was "Now it gets interesting".

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

TONY BLAIR was not enamoured with M.D.'s suggestion that the NHS should be depoliticised (*Your NHS*, BBC1, 20 February) but instead seemed at pains to be held to account for the state of the health service come the next election.

"New" Labour will doubtless produce a raft of performance indicators over the next few years to "prove" that the NHS is getting better, but with the prime minister's job at stake, the pressure will be enormous to buff the statistics and bury bad news.

A more reliable measure of progress would be the views of those working in the NHS, and indeed NHS chief executive Nigel Crisp told M.D. he was confident that doctors would play a key role in convincing the public that real improvements were underway.

Alas, most of the BBC's medical audience thought it would take at least another 10 years of stability and sustained funding for the NHS to be turned round. However, the government has improved the provision of intensive care beds (the much-publicised shunting of critically ill patients around the country was never a vote winner) and as it focuses resources on sexy diseases (cancer and heart attacks) it should make some headway.

Alas, as MD has repeatedly stressed, the equally important Cinderella diseases (eg stroke, epilepsy, mental illness, lung disease, dementia) are likely to remain badly under-resourced. M.D. currently works in genito-urinary medicine (GUM), pretty much bottom of the pile when it comes to ministerial interest and celebrity endorsement (herpes ribbon, anyone?)

The Bristol GUM clinic has been in ludicrously cramped "temporary accommodation" for more than 10 years. It's built on top of a plague pit, has to be sprayed regularly to get rid of fleas and many of the consulting rooms have no natural light or ventilation. On a hot day full of bad odours, it's uninhabitable.

Bristol's facilities are the worst of all the teaching hospitals in the UK, but many district hospitals have equally poor provision – even though attendances at GUM clinics have doubled over the last decade to more than a million a year in England alone. This has been mirrored by an increase in sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Between 1995 and 2000 STIs increased in the UK by 300,000 with gonorrhoea rising by 31 percent in the year 2000 alone. In the same year chlamydia – a major cause of pelvic infection and female infertility – rose by 17 percent and there were the largest number of new HIV infections since the start of the epidemic.

Unsurprisingly, GU clinics are struggling to cope: 42 percent of units are unable to see "urgent" cases within 24 hours; 77 percent of "open access" clinics have to turn patients away; and many are resorting to booked clinics only with 68 percent offering appointments in a week or more. The government has promised GP appointments within 48 hours, so why not for GUM?

A further problem is the misconception that if you've got a dose, you'd know about it. At any one time 10 percent of sexually active people have chlamydia, and 1 in 3 of us will get it during our lifetime. But 80 percent of women and 50 percent of men have no symptoms. Screening pilots in the Wirral and Portsmouth have shown clear benefits, but the government has only committed £47.5m for its entire sexual health strategy.

The majority of frontline GU doctoring is done by poorly supervised non-consultant career grade doctors in units often staffed by a single consultant. To cope with the current patient demand, the Royal College of Physicians has recommended a consultant expansion of 93 percent over the next five years and the Association of GUM Departments has estimated that £248m is needed for capital rebuilding and refurbishment. None of this is likely to happen .

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

SEVERAL times in recent years this column has reported on one of the most bizarre tragi-farces of modern legal history: the bungling by one group of lawyers after another of the attempt by hundreds of sheep farmers to seek redress for damage caused to their health by the use of organo-phosphorus sheep dips, which for 20 years up to 1992 was made compulsory by the government.

Not even the wildest cynic, however, could have predicted the grotesque fiasco in which this story now seems to be ending. A high court judge, Mr Justice Morland, has ordered not just that the case is lost and must be dropped, only months after he had allowed some of the plaintiffs to continue with the action. But he has suggested the plaintiffs may also now have to repay all the money they have been given in legal aid, more than £1.5m, all of which has already vanished into the wallets of the lawyers who encouraged them to proceed with the case. Furthermore he has given leave for the government and pharmaceutical companies they were suing to claim costs amounting to millions more, from farmers many of whom are so disabled that they can no longer earn a living.

It was in 1996 that the legal aid board decided that all outstanding OP compensation cases should be lumped together and given to a Norfolk firm of solicitors run by Richard Barr. Over the next five years, what became a group action was passed from one firm of solicitors to another. Barr, along with his legal aid contract, joined a London firm Hodge, Jones and Allen, with whom he then fell out, leaving the contract with another partner, Patrick Allen. Behind the scenes the preparation of the case seemed to become fraught with ever more confusion. Finally, in 2000, the defendants sought to have the case struck out and Hodge, Jones and Allen agreed there was no point in proceeding.

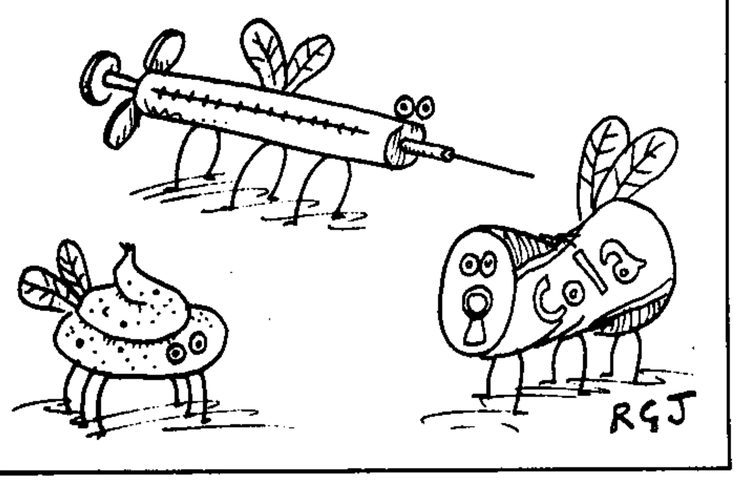
The case was then taken up by a Herefordshire firm, Gabb and Co, and in the summer of 2001 Justice Morland heard the defendants' plea that all the cases should be struck out. He agreed to strike out four, but allowed the rest to continue, with the defendants to bear the costs of the hearing. There was then confusion between the lawyers as to precisely what he had ruled over costs, and it was agreed they would come back on 29 January 2002 for a new direction.

On 23 January the judge wrote to Gabb and Co repeating his ruling of last summer, which allowed some plaintiffs to continue with their actions. But on 29 January, to everyone's astonishment, Morland announced he had now changed his mind. All claims, he now ruled, had failed and the claimants would have to pay all costs for both sides, including money already paid by the taxpayers in legal aid. This has left all concerned in a state of stunned dismay. Many of the farmers against whom Morland directed this shock ruling are not yet even aware he has made them liable, since their own cases were among the hundreds already dropped during the years when the case was going through its tortuous preparation between 1996 and 2001.

The chances of most farmers being able to pay are nil. The only people who have gained from this fiasco are the scores of lawyers involved. The only thing which now seems certain about this unspeakable tragedy of errors is that at least they will be allowed to hold on to their money.

'Muckspreader'

Insects evolving camouflage to fit into modern countryside



SIGNAL FAILURES

The RIP fund

ONE of the main achievements so far of the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) has been to block more than £50m of promised spending on the crumbling rail network.

In 1998 deputy prime minister John Prescott announced that the SRA would hand out £105m over three years from a new rail passenger partnership (RPP) fund. The money was for projects that couldn't be funded commercially, mainly outside south-east England. The three-year period ends this month and the SRA has awarded less than half the £105m.

The SRA has not itself initiated any RPP projects – so much for its claim of bringing "leadership and direction to the rail industry". Instead its army of bureaucrats waited in its London bunker for begging letters from local authorities and train companies hoping to convince the SRA that spending money on rail is worthwhile.

The massive under-spend is linked to the SRA's rejection of schemes – notably the valuable east-west rail link (*Eye* 1046) – where the bidders failed to meet the SRA's rather mysterious criteria. That's not surprising when local authorities have no specific railway expertise and have a duty to work only for their own fiefdoms. The train companies are also parochial and may be short on experienced rail professionals too. A genuinely strategic authority would have identified some schemes of regional importance and sought local funding partners.

The SRA tacitly acknowledged its RPP failure when it announced in December it would streamline the assessment process. That was too late to ensure the full £105m was spent; perhaps the SRA needs to streamline the process by which it decides to streamline itself.

To mask its failure, the SRA craftily reannounced the £105m. A statement beginning "£400m over 10 years was today pledged by the SRA" omitted to say that a quarter of that sum was pledged in 1998; only when the SRA's "strategy" was published a month later did it emerge that the original programme was extended from three to 10 years. A bog-standard new station with bus shelters now costs more than £2m. So even if the SRA hands out the entire fund, £40m per year will only scratch the surface of the improvements needed by regional railways.

If the bids that come in don't pass muster, the SRA will happily divert some of the cash to meeting government targets in the south-east and the nightmarish Virgin-Railtrack upgrade of the west coast mainline (*Eyes passim*). Or it could leave the unclaimed money in the treasury and earn itself a pat on the back from the chancellor.

● THE Go-Ahead Group last month partly blamed the attacks on 11 September for reduced growth on its South Central, Thames Trains and Thameslink rail franchises.

Passenger numbers grew by 1.6 percent on Thameslink instead of 7.6 percent a year earlier, and even declined on Thames Trains. Announcing the group's half-year results, Chris Moyes, deputy chief executive, said the number of "discretionary journeys" to London after 11 September was partly to blame, as was the reduction in American tourists visiting Oxford, Windsor and Stratford-upon-Avon.

The only problem with this is that all three franchises are dominated by London commuters; tourists are only a small fraction of their passengers; Americans are only a small fraction of tourists in Britain; and not all American tourists use trains to visit places like Oxford.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WINTER WONDERLAND

MARTIN WINTER, leader of Doncaster council and the Labour party's recently-selected candidate to be the town's mayor, is a man with big plans, dedicated to the regeneration of one of the most run-down parts of Britain.

His favourite project is the £12m Glass Park, which will transform a former Pilkington glass factory site outside Doncaster into a "community" organic farm, enterprise centre, craft workshops, café, composting scheme, riding stables, garden, microbrewery/pub... and fish farm.

So far, however, the transformation is all in Cllr Winter's head. The site currently consists of a stagnant pond full of old tyres and milk crates next to the factory's former dump, where glass pokes through the thin soil.

Back in June 2000 a company called Bramall & Ogden Ltd and its agent, John M. Hunt, sought outline permission to build more than 100 houses on land off Sandall Lane, Doncaster, across the road from the Glass Park. The site was not designated for residential use in the district plan, but B&O's application had an imaginative solution. In exchange for redesignation, it proposed to give £120,000 to the Glass Park Development Company (GPDC) in a so-called "106" agreement. It referred admiringly to the Glass Park's "ambitious plans" — which had been explained to Hunt by Cllr Winter. The application was eventually passed this January.

When GPDC was registered at Companies House, on 2 August 2000, the company secretary was Martin Jon Winter and the named director was Elizabeth Jeffress — Winter's fellow ward councillor. The current secretary is Carolyne Hunter — Mrs Martin Winter.

B&O, aka Bramall Construction, is part of the Keepmoat group (*Eyes passim*), the developer named in a 1997 district auditor's report for lavishing gifts and hospitality on Doncaster councillors. B&O's agent John Hunt is a former Doncaster planner who left to set up his own consultancy after complaints about his relationships with developers. The council officer who acts as "gatekeeper" on most of the Glass Park's fundraising efforts is Keith Miller. Miller once received a £500 wedding present from Keepmoat and was a guest at the company's box at Hillsborough football ground.

So why, after all that has happened in Doncaster, would a prominent councillor be daft enough to sit down with a representative of a development company already criticised for its conduct of business with the most corrupt council in the country?

We would have asked Cllr Winter, but as he wrote to the *Eye* last year: "I do not intend to enter into an ongoing dialogue with you on these matters. I feel you are simply seeking to make mischief. My energies are used more productively leading Doncaster council on an extremely demanding regeneration agenda."

TAKING THE WATERS

WATCHERS of Bath's over-hyped and over-budget Spa project will be interested to hear that councillors are about to embark on a vital "fact-finding" mission to the agreeable spa in Valkenburgh, Holland, run by Thermae, the Dutch company that will eventually run the Bath Spa.

Council officers have been in a bit of a quandary over the travel arrangements. After the recent embarrassment of the expensive trip to London by council leaders — to beg for a government handout because the council is so hard up (*Eye* 1043) — this time there will be no first-class train travel. The council has been more mindful of the pennies by opting to take a budget flight to Brussels from Stansted at a cost of just £1,500. Not bad value when you consider that a mere 13 people will be going on this particular junket... sorry, fact-finding tour.

Cunty Councillor Ian Morris

● **MUCH tittering in Leicestershire over the misprint in the heading on a press release (above) issued on 20 February by county councillor Ian Morris announcing his resignation from the council's ruling Conservative group. In the handout Cllr Morris, who represents Lutterworth, said he had decided to sit as an independent because of the Tories' "lack of interest" in the town. "I can no longer go on defending a situation I know to be wrong," he wrote. Lack of space presumably prevented Cllr Morris from mentioning that he actually lives and works 100 miles away in Bristol and has only attended one full council meeting in the last six months – just enough to claim his £6,000-a-year allowance and avoid being kicked off the council for non-attendance. No wonder his former colleagues warmly agree with Cllr Morris's own description of himself.**

VIDEO NASTY

BIRMINGHAM council has found a new high-powered adviser to help get rid of its council houses. Former Aston Villa manager Ron Atkinson stars in a £132,000 video sent to 88,000 council homes which urges tenants to vote "yes" in the forthcoming "stock transfer" ballot (*Eye* 1047).

The cost of the video, including Big Ron's fee, will ultimately come out of tenants' rents. Atkinson is an expert on council houses because, er, he once lived in one, although he now occupies a £500,000 des res in Worcestershire.

The video itself has already caused problems, and not just because of the cost. It shows housing chairman Dennis Minnis outside what is presented as one of the council's nicer properties. In fact the house shown is not a council house at all, having been bought by a tenant 15 years ago. The current owner, whose wife appears in the video without her permission, is threatening to sue.

● **IN THE MONEY: Darryl "Bumptious" Stephenson, chief executive of East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC), who has been awarded a £36,000 pay rise to bring his salary up to £140,000 a year from, appropriately, 1 April. The 34.5 percent rise, recommended in a report by accountants PriceWaterhouseCoopers, was revealed a week after the council said it was raising council tax bills by 5.8 percent and cutting services by £4.5m. Any difficulty Darryl may have finding the extra council tax should be offset by the fact that his wife Susan Lockwood will also be receiving a handy PWC-recommended increase on the £90,000 she already gets as ERYC's head of legal services.**

OUT OF POCKET: The council taxpayers of Durham, facing a 14.8 percent increase in their bills next year, who have just seen a former old folks' home which was sold by the Labour county council at auction for £66,000 before Christmas, come back on the market — at £245,000.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE *Eye* has received a desperate plea for information from the staff of WS Atkins, the PFI firm contracted to run education services in the London borough of Southwark (see *Eyes passim*).

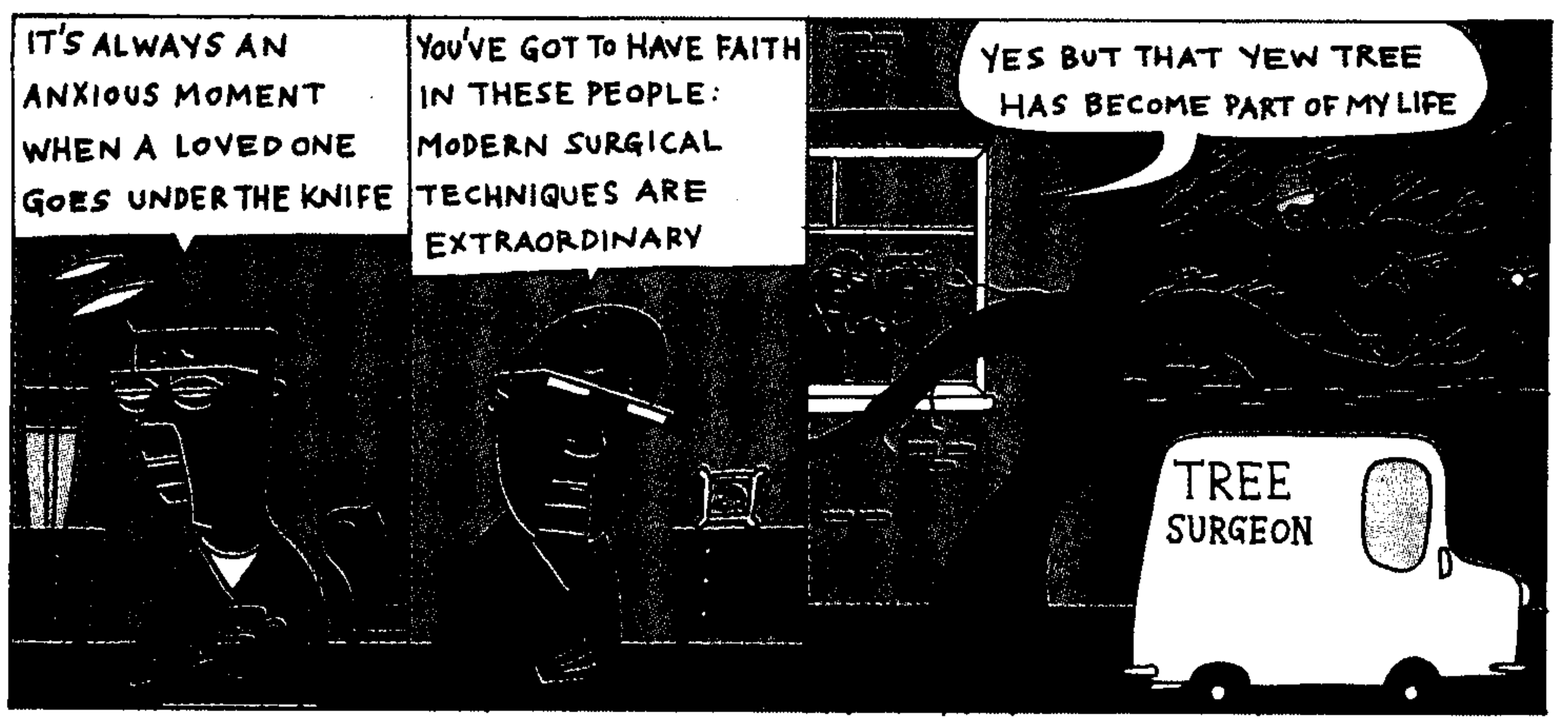
Education workers want to know the real reason for the recent departure of WS Atkins's head of school improvement, Hilary Pitts, after they were excluded from a meeting where she told Southwark school heads why she was leaving. In an anonymous letter the firm's employees ask: "What are WS Atkins so afraid of? What did Ms Pitts, one of the few respected and effective members of the management, have to say? Why did she leave? We think we should be told."

When the *Eye* put these questions to WS Atkins, however, it became clear the firm has no intention of revealing why Ms Pitts, who joined the company from Stoke-on-Trent LEA where she was assistant director of education (*Eye 1016*), is moving to pastures new. Instead the company issued a bland statement saying: "Hilary chose to tender her resignation. She was well-liked among head teachers and one head teacher chose to call a meeting in order to invite Hilary to explain her position. The director of education services, the commercial director and the director of government services for WS Atkins attended, and given that the meeting was for head teachers and convened by a head teacher, any other WS Atkins presence was unnecessary."

In the face of rumours of a blazing row between Pitts and other senior members of WS Atkins staff over the company's conflict of interest between making a profit and improving education services, WS Atkins's director of education, Steve Davis, wrote to all head teachers in the borough. "Hilary has decided to leave Southwark for professional reasons," said Davis. At a meeting of the council's education committee on 18 February, it was revealed that WS Atkins, brought in under pressure from central government following a critical Ofsted report in December 1999, has not made promised improvements to education in the borough. Key Stage 2 test results are well below the national average, while GCSE results remain lower than hoped, although within target. WS Atkins is also currently at the centre of a row over the lack of school places in the borough. At the meeting, where it was announced that a decision on whether to hand over even more responsibility for education to WS Atkins was being deferred for a technical reason, the Labour cabinet member for education, Patrick Kelly, admitted that WS Atkins would be fined over its failure to meet targets. According to unconfirmed reports the firm might be ordered to pay up to £75,000 in compensation.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


IT'S ALWAYS AN ANXIOUS MOMENT WHEN A LOVED ONE GOES UNDER THE KNIFE
YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE FAITH IN THESE PEOPLE: MODERN SURGICAL TECHNIQUES ARE EXTRAORDINARY
YES BUT THAT YEW TREE HAS BECOME PART OF MY LIFE
TREE SURGEON

NOOKS and CORNERS

THERE's glory for you! On St Valentine's Day, "the highly respected 'Piloti' of *Private Eye* fame" was praised in a speech in the House of Commons. Quite right too, of course. The speaker was Bob Russell, MP for Colchester, who recalled that the case of "Jumbo", the magnificent Victorian water tower in that city, has twice appeared in our "esteemed organ".

Indeed it has (see *Eye* 889 and 1031). I first objected to the asinine proposal to replace the cast-iron water tank at the summit with a glass box serving as a private dwelling. I then noted that, at the last general election, the Conservative parliamentary candidate backed the proposal by current owner while Mr Russell (Lib Dem) and the Labour candidate supported Colchester borough council's opposition to mutilating Jumbo. The Conservative vote fell and Mr Russell was elected with a tripled majority.

Unfortunately, since that happy day the appeal of the owner against the council's refusal of planning permission and listed building consent has been upheld by the planning inspectorate of the department of culture, media 'n' sport and he has been allowed to replace *three* sides of the water tank with glass while the solid side facing Colchester High Street must remain. This fatuous and grotesque compromise has been given official blessing despite the opposition not only of local opinion and the local authority but also — and most important — of English Heritage, the government's statutory adviser on historic buildings and the historic environment.

This seems both to me and Mr Russell a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs - hence his early-day motion in favour of English Heritage, tabled on 12 December, which states "That this House... believes that the views of English Heritage should not be overturned by a single planning inspector, and that in such instances where a contrary view is taken then the final decision should be referred to the secretary of state for a second opinion to be sought; regrets that too many of the nation's historic and listed buildings have already been lost; and therefore urges the secretary of state to investigate and take all the steps available to him to reverse the outcome of the planning appeal in respect of the Grade II Listed Jumbo Water Tower in Colchester, the largest surviving Victorian water tower in Britain, which a planning inspector has ruled can be destroyed, contrary to the wishes of the democratically elected councillors."

Mr Russell's speech contained some stirring stuff. "An applicant," he noted, "unhappy with a decision, has the right to go to appeal. It is not unknown for wealthy owners to employ highly paid lawyers and so-called 'experts' prepared to prostitute themselves for payment and to give evidence to suit the case and pocket of the owner." I have never put it better myself.

And he also notes that although Jumbo was built by Colchester Corporation and funded by ratepayers, it was transferred in 1974 to the new publicly-owned Anglian water authority which, when privatised by Mrs Thatcher, flogged it off to property speculators. "At no time did the people of Colchester receive a single penny in compensation for the public asset which was taken from them."

All the under-secretary of state for transport, local government and the regions could do in reply was reiterate that "right of appeal is a long-established part of the planning system" and that "the planning inspectorate has an impressive reputation in its handling of planning appeals." (Hmm... Bob Russell began his speech by observing that "every week the planning inspectorate based in Bristol authorises the demolition or disfigurement of three listed buildings, contrary to the wishes of the local communities where those historic buildings are located.")

Russell was also told that "preservation need not mean fossilising buildings" and that the government's planning policy guidance note 15 accepts "that generally the best way to secure the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use." Very true — but removing three sides of the water-tank in favour of a sort of illuminated giant fish tank in the sky is not so much "adapting" but mutilating a listed building and undermining its integrity. Besides, there were other less destructive ways of using it which also allowed public access to a viewing gallery.

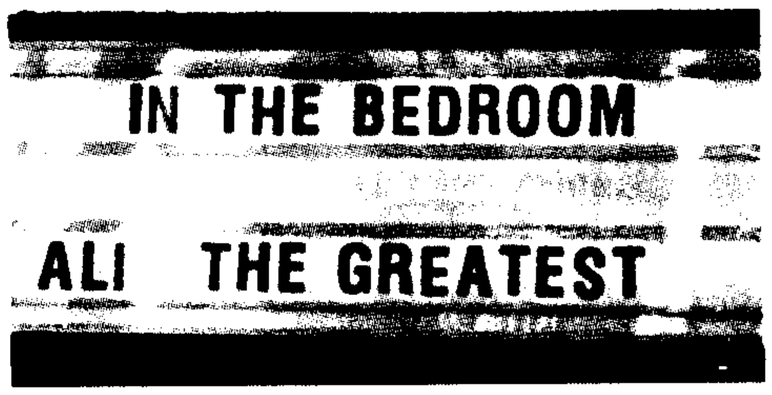
The MP for Colchester argued that "the debate is of national significance. By focusing on a controversial decision in my constituency, I want to illustrate something that happens throughout the country." He is right. The marginalising of the expert advice of English Heritage reflects the crassly modernist prejudices of a government which is increasingly dominated by the interests of developers while the reliance — yet again — on big banal glass walls as a universal design solution reveals the intellectual bankruptcy of the majority of the architectural profession.

IN DARING to invoke the wrath of the devotees of our "national sport" by criticising Arsenal Football Club's huge £400m property development involving the moving of its stadium (Eye 1046), I noted that the grant of planning permission by Islington Council had not immediately been endorsed by the secretary of state, one Stephen Byers.

Now the wretch has gone and done the predictable and decided not to call in this outrageous case despite the thousands of local objections from both individuals and affected business. Another reason this conspicuously unprincipled politician should go.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Metro Cinema, London W1*



Submitted by Trevor Beattie. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE real scandal at English National Opera is not the "radical" production of Verdi's *Masked Ball*, all wee and poo and buggery, but the fact that after two dismal performances in January, slated by the critics, musical director Paul Daniel had the cheek to let a paying audience again watch him learning to conduct Wagner's *The Valkyrie*.

There had not been one rehearsal of this notoriously demanding score since his last attempt to scramble through it more than a month earlier. The singers may have rehearsed with a piano, but that's a different matter from picking up cues from a full orchestra.

So there was a kind of inevitability to the way the show ground to a halt half-way through act three on Saturday 23 February. The young Canadian soprano Kathleen Broderick, as Brunnhilde, was clearly struggling, so Daniel stopped, turned to the audience and made his excuses. After some kerfuffle in the wings general manager Nicholas Payne came on to explain that Ms Broderick was feeling unwell. (As might anyone, having "dried" in front of a couple of thousand people.) She might have felt a little better on the night had she been given the opportunity to run through her part at a dress rehearsal. After 10 minutes the company was told to cut to Wotan's Farewell scene and the performance drew to a welcome close.

No doubt the unfortunate Ms Broderick will be made the scapegoat, but at ENO the sickness runs much deeper. According to Payne and Daniel, audiences are staying away because of that good old standby, "September 11".

According to the musicians, however, "miscasting, under-rehearsal, bad managerial decisions and musical direction" would be nearer the mark.

THE South African composer Kevin Volans is notoriously temperamental, so it was no surprise to anyone at the BBC when he rejected every draft of a biographical note designed to accompany the first performance of a new piece commissioned from him by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, complaining that they failed to reflect his true stature as a creative artist.

As things turned out, the biography wasn't needed anyway. During the course of rehearsals Volans threw a temper tantrum and withdrew the piece, claiming that the BBCSO couldn't play it and that the conductor, Joseph Swensen, couldn't conduct.

His piece was a particularly complex score that split the orchestra into two separate performing groups but notated all the parts together, distinguishing the different groups with different coloured inks. Unfortunately, Joseph Swensen happens to be colour blind which may have given Volans the excuse for his bad behaviour.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

It's very daring of you, doing an installation about the evils of globalisation so soon after 9/11, Sophie!
You think I should wait a bit?
VICTORIA KLEE
CUTTING-EDGE ART · HOXTON

Letters

Truth the first casualty?

Sir,

Has M.D. ever had cause to turn up at a hospital either as a patient him/herself or in support of somebody who actually needs medical attention? I would say not from his/her pathetic bleatings. S/He says the staff are "overstretched" (Eye 1048), but I think a typical user's view shows otherwise.

I've worked most of my life for private small to medium sized enterprises... and I would estimate that some 3 to 5 percent of staff in this sector get made redundant or sacked each year if they are underperforming, surplus to requirements, or in other ways not needed. That's the way the world works. If a solitary nurse is sacked in any one year it makes national headlines and the media tries to make us all feel guilty.

By my estimation about 30,000 or so of the million or so NHS staff should be shown the door each year for the above shortcomings, but this is not the case in the gravy train public sector. Any old crap is good enough when you've got a job for life (plus benefits). Hospitals are filthy, but somehow it isn't the staff's fault. Mistakes and poor care are endemic, but again, we can't blame the staff...

Tony's making a mistake if he thinks throwing money at this culture will improve it. If you get paid regardless of performance then you will not change your ways... It's human nature. These people have to learn that they must perform or seek alternative employment. I'd rather take my chances and pay for my own care when the time comes than be crippled by taxes to support this self-serving culture.

CHRIS HOLLEBON (WORKER),

Weston-Super-Mare.

PS: I know there is a 15-20 percent core of NHS workers that are true, diligent hard-working saints, but they should have the nonce (sic) to expose the rest as a bunch of skivers.

More pedantry

Sir,

For the information of Ed Powles, Private Eye's Pedants Corner is where the pedants are to be found just as the Letters Page is where the letters are to be found. As both Corner and Page belong to Private Eye and not to any featured pedants or letters, the latter clearly don't merit an apostrophe.

Yours enematically,
MICHAEL ADAMS,

London W5.

Waugh memorial

Sir,

In a moment of weakness I decided to subscribe to your organ, thereby freeing a son-in-law from sending me second-hand besmirched and belated copies.

But, blow me, no sooner do I receive my first purchased copy than I see that you publish "Princess Margaret Cremated" in characteristic poor taste.

Not that I'm a royalist, mind you – far from it. What I DO object to is that if any of your cronies dies you treat them with the kiddest of kid gloves. The last time, as I recall, was Auberon Waugh, with page upon page of gush.

Anyway, it's too late to cancel my subscription, and the rest of the organ is not bad.

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN HASSECK,

London NW4.

Cruel secrets

Sir,

The reason the RSPCA may not have obtained much evidence from farmers as to cruelty to animals during the cull is that farmers were made to sign the official secrets act.

Yours,
NAME & ADDRESS SUPPLIED,

Cumbria.

0 out of 10

Sir,

Congratulations to Mark Lawrence (Complaints don't add up, Eye 1048) for his success in being able to follow the educational maxim of reading the question in the impossible Edexcel exam paper. However, for the rest of us mere mortal Upper Sixth students who have suffered at the hands of this exam board, their actions remain inexcusable.

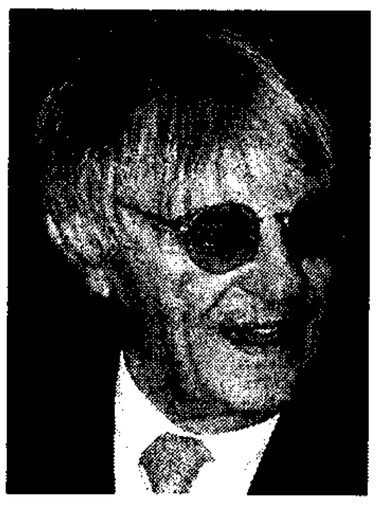
Their incompetence seems to know no bounds, ranging from basic errors like not sending enough copies of our history AS exam paper to my school to more serious mistakes such as, in the same exam, setting a specific question on a part of the syllabus they had previously stated they would not ask candidates about specifically. Edexcel are evidently incapable of reading their own questions, rendering us pupils, with however much help from their expensive textbooks, unable to answer them.

However, the injury I myself have been caused by Edexcel is nothing compared to victims of the board's shoddy marking system, an issue that has not been previously raised. In the past five years at my school there have been two separate incidences of an entire year's English and English literature GCSE grades being considerably lower than was predicted. In the case four years ago, Edexcel corrected the errors in remarking and all students went up a grade; last year's candidates were not so lucky and so many have begun the English literature AS course with a GCSE result that does not do justice to their abilities.

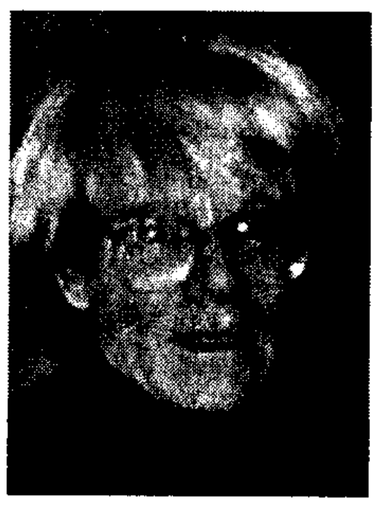
ELAINA EVANS,

Harrow.

Lookalike



Warhol



Ecclestone

Sir,

Have you noticed the similarity between Andy Warhol and Bernie Ecclestone?

DAVID SCOTT,

Via e-mail.

Be Holden to whom?

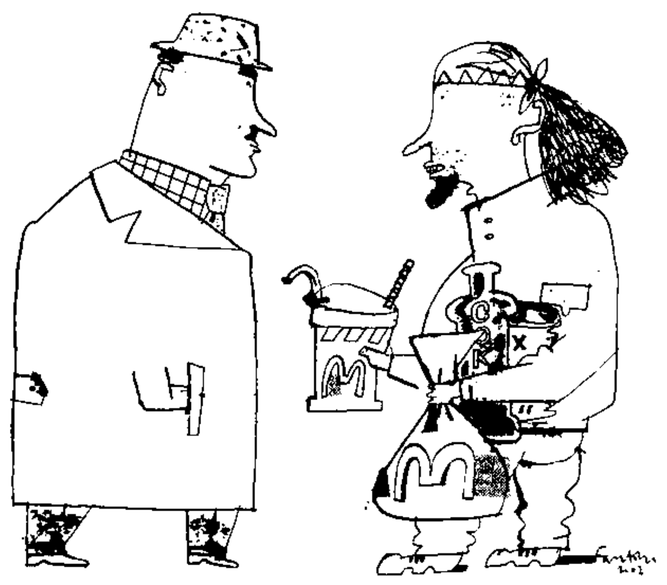
Sir,

I'm not sure Wendy Holden has any need to apologise on behalf of your reviewer, who mistook her for me, having described her novel Fame Fatale as "mercilessly unamusing". If there was an unflattering comparison lurking between the lines (and I certainly didn't spot it), it would be the first in almost 15 years of mistaken identity as she followed in my footsteps to the London Evening Standard, the Daily Telegraph, and, eventually, into publishing.

Yours sincerely,
WENDY HOLDEN,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See (5)



"Do you know of any litter bins around here?"

Down on the farmer

Sir,

Re: Down on the Farm, 8 February. Gumboot criticises Margaret Beckett's hypocrisy in advocating support for both the environment and free trade. I would suggest it is Gumboot who is the hypocrite because it is the system of price support for farmers that he defends that harms the environment by encouraging farmers to farm more intensively than they otherwise would. The higher the price of a commodity, the greater the incentive to produce more by means of additional fertiliser and pesticide.

Furthermore, Gumboot's claim that the cost of supporting farmers is insignificant is simply not true. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the cost to taxpayers and consumers of support to farmers in the EU in 2000 was euros 97,907 million. This is equivalent to £158 per head (using an EU population of 377 million) and an average exchange rate for 2000 of 1.64 or £632 for a family of four, hardly insignificant.

Perhaps Gumboot and his/her colleague Muckspreader could be more objective in future and stop acting like spokespersons for the NFU.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN NAIRN,

Weymouth.

Rank betrayal

Sir,

With reference to Police 5 (1048). The Met's Mike Todd is described as being "promoted" from deputy commissioner to assistant commissioner. Surely the Metropolitan police command structure hasn't been buggered about that much by "new" Labour? The rank of "deputy commissioner" was always senior to that of an "assistant commissioner" in the good old George Dixon days. Or were you thinking of "deputy assistant commissioner" (a lower life form) all along?

Yours,
PETE WARMINGTON-GARDNER
(Ex Provincial Plod),

Via email.

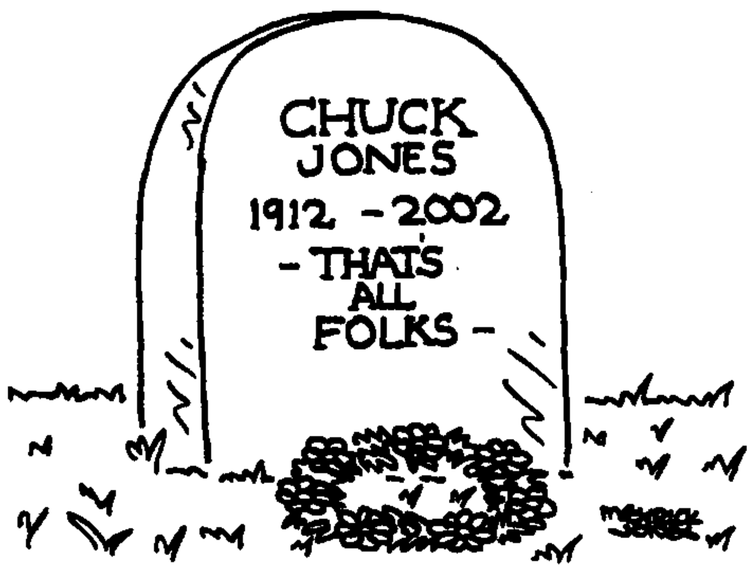
Kop out

Sir,

As a reader since 1969 I was disappointed to see ("Unfair Kop", 1048) misinformation being disseminated. The city council is currently consulting about a city academy for the Anfield/Breckfield area. No decision has been made yet. The distance between Anfield Comp and the proposed site is not "three miles away" – it is just over three-quarters of a mile. Is 400 percent your usual exaggeration quotient?

Best wishes,
CLLR. PAUL CLEIN,

Liverpool City Council.



Pilot error?

Sir,

Re: A Hull of a Mess (1048). I must redress some of the increasingly one sided reporting of the dispute regarding the striking Humber pilots.

Firstly, the Humber pilots had previously been "self employed" in their own cooperative (read closed shop) and billed Asociated British Ports (ABP) for their services. However, ABP (and all previous owners of the Hull docks and waterways) were (and remain) responsible for all aspects of river navigation on which the pilots relied. When ABP attempted to "rationalise" the situation and employ the pilots direct, they rebelled and the current dispute ensued. Several misconceptions have arisen.

Firstly, the "inexperienced" pilots subsequently employed all have to have a minimum certificate of master mariner and to have served between five and seven years working as a ship's mate... Secondly, any pilot guiding craft on the river rely completely on ABP for up to date information and resources, so a sudden increase in accidents should not be laid at the door of the new recruits.

As for the article mentioned above, it does not take into account the severe weather conditions experienced on the Humber that week (blanket fog for seven days and winds gusting at 70mph plus) which would render the list of incidents commonplace. Furthermore, the vessel Englishman is a sea-going tug and would not require a pilot on board, no record exists of the Bohinj being berthed at King George V dock on the dates mentioned and as for the "ABP engineers" who so mysteriously arrived on the scene, well, ABP don't employ any. The claim that the strike is solid is also misrepresentative. At least a third of the original pilots have been reemployed under virtually identical conditions (earning up to £70,000 pa).

As someone whose father worked the docks for 48 years (until the late 80s), I have no love for Associated British Ports. However, I do regard the Eye as a scrupulously fair organ and have been reading your coverage with increasing annoyance.

Yours,
STAN BROADWELL,
Bristol.

Split meaning

Sir,

Please ask your team to do us mental health workers a favour and stop using the term "schizophrenic" to describe any sort of split approach, by anyone to anything.

The Consignia article (1048) was the last straw – it's hard enough trying to overcome public prejudice, without journalists I respect reinforcing negative stereotypes. The medical term schizophrenia describes a gradual withdrawal from reality, into self, with no splits of any kind, personality or otherwise. Its use in this context was not just inaccurate, but lazy. I expect more from the Eye team.

Regards,
RICHARD ALLAN [RMN Staff Nurse],
Leeds.

Bum note

Sir,

I cannot believe your esteemed organ would deliberately attempt to mislead your readers. Your cover picture (1047) might have led one to assume that Mr Blair was in Africa. Not so.

On this occasion, contrary to your caption exhorting him to "go home", he was actually very much at home – in the gardens of 10 Downing Street! His companion drummers? Residents of the London borough of Hackney. The event? Launching the National Foundation for Youth Music in June '99. I know – I was there!

True, we are diverse, we are multi-cultural and we would love to work in sunnier climes as you imply, but we still have much to do here in the UK first! Long may you continue to portray life as it is/as you see it – it certainly made us chuckle!

CHRISTINA COKER, Chief Executive,
National Foundation For Youth Music.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"There's a lot of anti-Semitism, and it's not just against the Jewish."
CATE BLANCHETT, Radio 4
(Kevin Walton)

"You only get one opportunity of an England debut."
ALAN SHEARER
(Peter Froggatt)

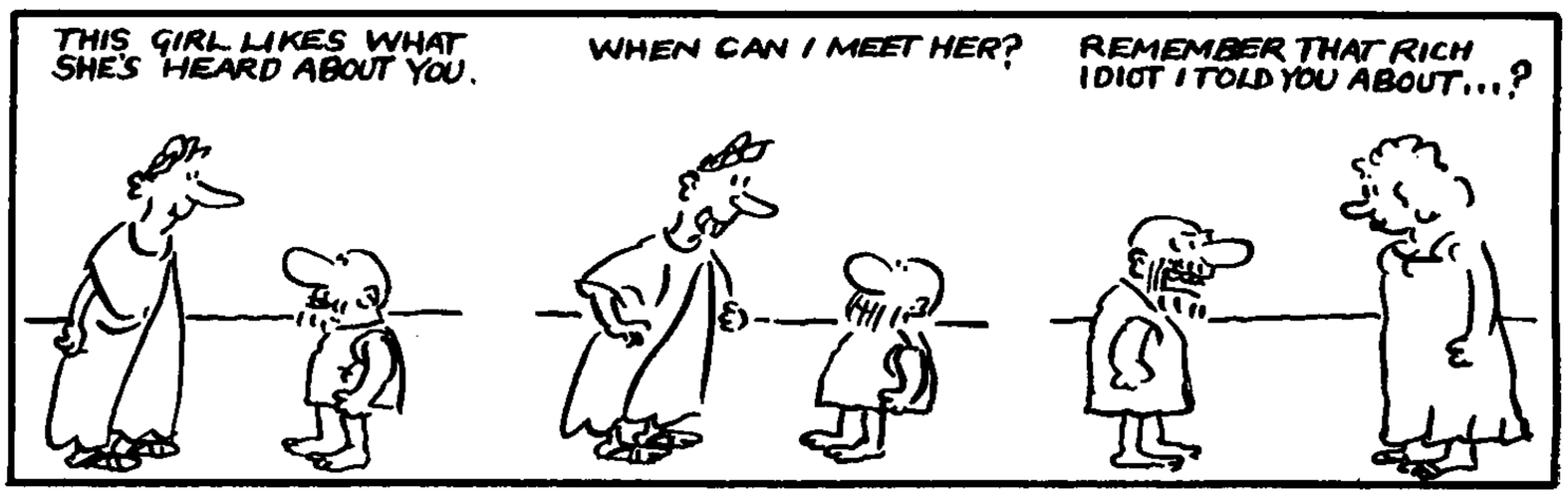
"There's going to be four or five teams battling for the top six spots."
CHRIS WADDLE, Radio 5 Live
(Peter Cowlishaw)

"Alain Baxter faces an uphill struggle in the slalom tomorrow."
Commentator, BBC1
(Tony Kench)

"... the midfield is outnumbered numerically."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Joe Cardwell)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



SPIKE MILLIGAN
1918–2002

Spike Milligan contributed, wrote many letters to the editor and drew cartoons irregularly for the magazine during the 60s and 70s. He featured on the 1980 flimsy disc, "The Sound of Talbot" and appeared in two major libel appeal fund-raising events (1966 and 1977).

1963

9 Orme Court
London W.2

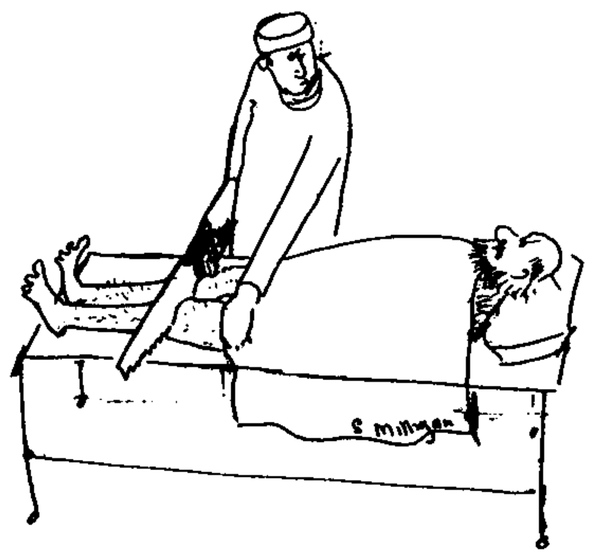
Dear Sir,
I have read your paper ever since its first Libel case, since when I have read no other. Despite this record of devotion, I have not yet been given the golden opportunity of Libel; as you know, it is hard to make a living these days, as any good Randolph Churchill will tell you.
Therfore, sir, unless I see grounds for a healthy Libel in the next few weeks, I shall be forced to return to the Paris Match and the Olympia Press, where the opportunities are more fullsome.
Sincerely,

Spike Milligan

SPIKE MILLIGAN

Our Libellous Correspondent writes:

Spike Milligan is a dirty Irish poove.



"This doesn't necessarily mean you'll paint like Toulouse Lautrec."

SPIKE MILLIGAN would like to meet rich well-insured widow. Intention murder.

Private Eye Small Ads, 1989
(He received 48 replies)

Still barking

Sir,

Man lost his dog, put an ad in the paper and said "Here boy!"

Yours faithfully,
SPIKE MILLIGAN,
Rye, E. Sussex

Letter from **America**
from Our Own Correspondent

HERE in the Land of the Free, two little-reported events have confirmed that those who fail to remember the past are condemned to repeat it. First up is Lynne Cheney, wife of vice-president Dick. Her husband has been reluctant to release details of the six meetings he had with Kenneth Lay and other Enron executives shortly before the energy company went bust.

Apparently without a shred of irony, the Second Lady has been busy lending her moral weight to the American Council of Trustees Alumni (ACTA), an organisation dedicated to naming and shaming politicians and academics it claims are unpatriotic and lacking in integrity.

Following the attacks on the US last September, ACTA commissioned a report entitled "Defending Civilisation, How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It". The foreword to the 29-page report, now posted on the net (www.goacta.org), is given political clout courtesy of Mrs Cheney, who exhorts members of ACTA "to understand how fortunate we are to live in freedom".

Senator Joe McCarthy (remember him?) would have been proud of the ACTA report. It alerts us Americans to the subversive dangers lurking on our campuses in the form of 115 academics and politicians who allegedly do not endorse every part of the Bush administration's strategy to combat terrorism. Take the Rev Jesse Jackson, who told students at Harvard Law School: "We must build bridges and relationships, not simply bombs and walls." Another enemy of the apple pie way of life is Prof Joel Beinin of Stanford University, who had the temerity to declare: "If Osama Bin Laden is confirmed to be behind the attacks, the United States should bring him before an international tribunal on charges of crimes against humanity." What a wimp!

An unnamed professor of history at Ohio State University is classified as "unpatriotic" for observing: "I am wary of wars for freedom, which in general have produced the exact opposite effect, for during the cold war the communist menace became the basis for McCarthyist attacks on civil liberties."ACTA condemns those who have not "followed the president in calling evil by its rightful name" and have "invoked tolerance as an antidote to evil". So what we need is more Bin Laden-style intolerance, huh?

Meanwhile, with our media still obsessed with the aftermath of 9/11, our president's spin machine has been in overdrive. The latest bit of media manipulation concerns the appointment of vice-admiral John Poindexter on 14 February as head of a newly created agency, the Information Awareness Office (IAO).

In 1983 Poindexter was appointed national security adviser by Ronald Reagan, whose vice-president at the time was Bush Snr. In 1990, along with Col Oliver North, Poindexter was charged with perverting the course of justice after the pair had destroyed evidence that showed their involvement in the Iran-Contra debacle.

In a move that would have made your own Jo Moore breathless with admiration, the day before the appointment was to be made, the administration announced that a terrorist attack on America was likely "within 24 hours, if not in hours". Needless to say, no attack happened, nor was any intelligence produced to suggest that an attack was more likely then than at any other time. But it was enough to send our media into a frenzy, to the virtual exclusion of minor items such as the rehabilitation of a disgraced former national security adviser.

And what will the IAO do in the fight for freedom and democracy? It will eavesdrop on phone and email communication in the US, funded by taxpayers, from part of the extra $48bn promised to help defend the liberty, which Dubya holds so dear.

With Poindexter on the job, ACTA will doubtless soon be able to add yet more names, courtesy of the IAO, to the list of mild-mannered Profs determined to destroy the American Dream.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Apostle Freddie still fully intends to answer God's call to join Him in heaven," Apostle Dennis Arends told a large and disappointed crowd gathered outside the Apostolic Reform Church in Cradock, Eastern Cape, "but his funeral has been rescheduled. All I can say now is that he will soon be going home, and that he drank a small amount of soup on Monday, simply to dispel the stigma of suicide."

Arends was speaking after fifty-eight-year-old Freddie Isaacs had failed to die, despite publicly promising to do so, and inviting a large crowd to witness his burial. A spokeswoman for the Cradock funeral parlour (who had dug his grave and had expected to be burying him)

explained that "Freddie had a vision in September that his time on earth would soon be over. He originally predicted his death would be on the 28th of January, so in December he went on a wild spending spree. But he didn't die, and now he can't pay for all the things he bought. Last week, he said he'd definitely stopped eating and would die today, but I saw him in a cafe yesterday, buying bread and milk. He keeps postponing the moment, but some of the businesses he owes money to are very very angry with him, so I expect we'll be burying him soon, one way or another." *(Daily Mail & Guardian [Zambia], 5/2/02. Spotter: Pete [Johannesburg])*

— ● —

● *"The variety of foreign bodies which have found their way into the rectum is hardly less remarkable than the ingenuity displayed in their removal. A turnip has been delivered per anum by the use of obstetric forceps. A stick firmly implanted has been withdrawn by inserting a gimlet into its lower end. A tumbler, mouth downwards, has been extracted by filling the interior with a wet plaster of Paris bandage, leaving the end of the bandage protruding, and allowing the plaster to set. Other items include a pepper pot, removed by Dr. L.S. Carstairs, Royal Northern Hospital, London. On removal, it was found to be inscribed 'a present from Margate.'*

"If unsurmountable difficulty is experienced in grasping any foreign body in the rectum, a left lower laparotomy is necessary, which allows that object to be pushed from above into the assistant's fingers in the rectum. If there is considerable laceration of the mucosa, a temporary colostomy is advisable." (Bailey & Love's "Short Practice of Surgery" 1992. Spotter: Adrian Smith)

— ● —

● "WE ARE a U.S. based international ministry that wants to provide you with the credentials you need to serve as a legal minister. WE BELIEVE that ordination should be given to all who ask. One of the benefits of being a LEGAL member of the clergy is that you are authorized to perform the rites and ceremonies of the church. They include:

"WEDDINGS – You can earn part-time income officiating marriages. Couples are searching for wedding officiates. Some pastors work full-time as wedding officiates, so can you! And we'll put you in our database of officiates – we receive thousands of requests for ordained ministers! We'll get you a dozen weddings a day if you can take the pace!

"FUNERALS – The simple fact is that people die every day, providing a never-ending need for funeral officiates. It's not ALL grim work either!

"BAPTISMS – What a special way to welcome a child of God. As millions return to church and desire these official ceremonies, you are there to assist them! This adds to your part or full-time income as a minister!

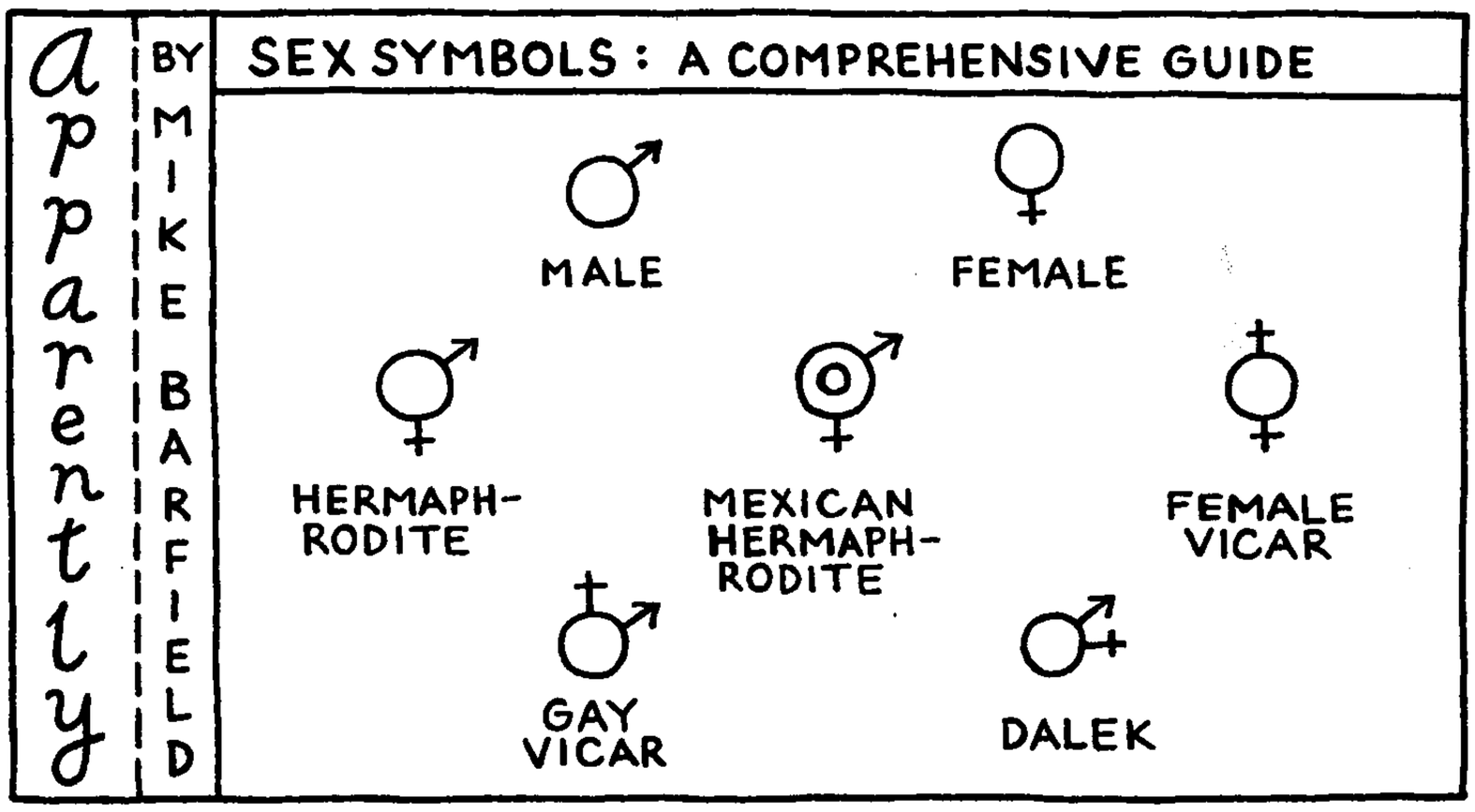
"PRISON MINISTRIES – Since you will be a Certified Minister, you can visit others in need. Assist those who are ready to CHANGE their lives. You can play a major part in that decision!

"HOSPITAL MINISTRIES – As an ordained clergy, you can be listed with most hospitals and conduct a successful hospital ministry.

"WANT TO START YOUR OWN CHURCH? After your ordination, you may start your own congregation! We can offer much assistance as you begin your new place of worship.

"WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING? 'You are truly an answer to prayer for myself and for hundreds, if not thousands, of men who have been frustrated with constitution, laws, and by-laws of most denominations who have denied brethren who have answered the call of God.' – Colorado Springs, Colorado.

"TO APPLY TODAY, for a small administration fee of $29.00, you will receive a professionally printed 8-inch by 10-inch color certificate and Proof of Minister Certification in your name and our monthly newsletter. For Cash, Check, or Money Order, complete the form below, make your check payable to 'TSG' and mail to: TSG Ordination Committee, Florida Administrative Center, 3206 South Hopkins Ave, PMB 89, Titusville, Florida 32780."



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

It's never a pretty sight, is it, when people gang up on some member of the community just for the pleasure of seeing them being made to suffer.

When I was at school, the word we used for people like that was "bullies", and I think we all know that to be a bully is just about the worst crime that any of us can be guilty of.

Look, you don't need me to tell you who I am talking about! It's the way people have recently been treating my good friend Stephen Byers.

It was always the boy with glasses, wasn't it, who got picked on by the school bullies?

And usually it was someone who stood out from the others because he was better at his work than they were.

All this is true of Stephen, who in the past few years has literally worked his fingers to the bone on his parish work.

Never once has he complained about any of the jobs I have asked him to carry out!

He has always been there at my right hand, asking "What can I do for you next, Vicar?"

But now this good and faithful servant of the parish (and of myself!) has been singled out for one of the most hateful campaigns of persecution that I can ever remember!

Name calling, personal abuse, even chanting that babyish old playground battle cry of the bully-boys, "Byers, Byers, your pants are on fire!"

Could anything be more beastly and horrid?

And all because Stephen openly admitted, like the transparently honest and decent person that he is, that he had been less than truthful in some of the things he has been saying about some of his colleagues at work.

But, hey, look, isn't the message here

that Stephen has come clean in admitting fully and frankly to his momentary lapse?

And which of us can honestly say that we have been 100% percent truthful every hour of every day of our lives?

Obviously a vicar like myself has to be! But the rest of you are bound from time to time to stray off the straight and narrow, and you wouldn't think much of me, would you, if I were now to turn on Stephen, my friend, just because he'd lied to everybody?

So I want you all to look into your hearts and think long and hard about how you can help him at this difficult time.

The truth is that Stephen is on a journey through life, as are we all, and now and again the going is bound to become a little rough!

There will be "leaves on the line". There will be points failures. There will be delays, cancellations and even tragic accidents!

Hey, no one said it was going to be easy!

So let's get behind Stephen, and give him all the support he can! Because by helping Stephen, you are helping me, your vicar! Think about it!

Yours ever,

Tony

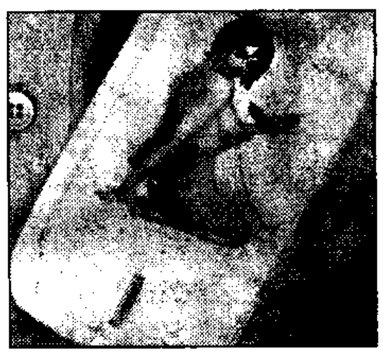
LENT TALKS

We were very fortunate to welcome the Vicar to talk to us on the theme of "What To Give Up For Lent". He began by explaining that the greatest moral issue of our time was in danger of being overlooked. These days, he said, people have become obsessed with trivia and gossip. He gave some examples, such as the recent fuss over Mr Enron and the church central heating system, or Mr Mittal's gift of £125,000 to the PCC. What were silly little issues like this, he asked, compared with the moral challenge posed to our society by the overwhelming evil of foxhunting? Here was something which people could give up, not just for Lent, but for all time.

While Mrs Beckett was proposing a vote of thanks, there was an unfortunate incident involving two lady parishioners who had not been invited, Mrs Mallalieu and Mrs Hoey. Holding up a photograph of a dead chicken, they shouted that fox-hunting was the only way to rid the country of "nature's worst serial murderer". Luckily, Mr Blunkett of Neighbourhood Watch was on hand to get the two ladies arrested.

The vicar begs parishioners not to give him *all* the credit for the victory of the ladies curling team! (by local artist Mr Nougerede).

FASHION NOTES



A number of you have noticed my new trendy pink shirt with rather racy cuffs showing a nubile young lady on the telephone! It's a gift from my new friend Mr "Dirty" Desmond of the Express Adult Mag Mart, who tells me that such amusing images are freely available on his website www.ank.co.uk T.B.

HELLO, AGAIN!

For those of you who are new to the parish, let me introduce myself. I'm Peter, a very, very close friend of the Vicar and you are about to see a lot more of me. I have been on a short sabbatical, but the Vicar has now agreed that the time has come for me to return to Parish duties.

Far be it from me to criticise those who have been nominally helping the Vicar during my absence, but frankly the parish is a complete mess and it's going to need some sorting out.

Luckily, I have kept my list of names and addresses, so I know where you all live.

You are all very much looking forward to working with me again.

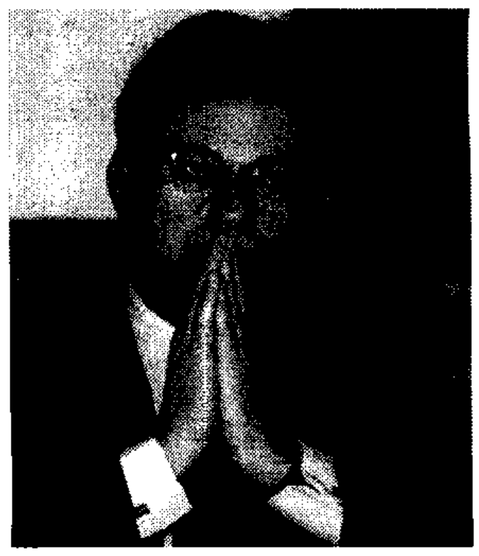
PETER MANDELSON

Ask The Vicar

Q (sent by parishioner Tony McWalter): Could the Vicar tell us in a sentence what is this "philosophy of life"?

A: I am very glad to be given the opportunity to spell out my core beliefs. I think it is very important that people should ask this kind of question, and not feel in any way inhibited from putting to their vicar any question that they want, provided that it is asked in good faith and not to catch him out or to make him look in some way silly! I hope this answers Mr McWalter's question fully and honestly! T.B.

(This is the last of a new series in which parishioners are able to put personal questions to the Vicar on any subject they wish. A.C.)



Mr Byers leads the prayers on Sunday. He prayed especially for the jobless in the hope that he would not soon be joining them! T.B

THE MEMO THAT PROVES MANDELSON IS INNOCENT

by Our Political Staff **Andrew Marrvelous**

A PREVIOUSLY unseen memo from a junior civil servant, Simon Jobsworth, has finally put Peter Mandelson in the clear over the so-called Hinduja-Passports-For-Dome-Cash Scandal.

The memo is now in the hands of Sir Wally Hammond QC, who produced the original report which exonerated everybody involved.

But now the Jobsworth memo opens the way for the return of Peter Mandelson to public life to resume his career as a man who gets sacked within a few weeks.

Says Sir Wally, "This is the clearest possible demonstration of Mr Mandelson's integrity and indeed my own in entirely ignoring its implications."

That Memo In Full

Dear Minister,

If you want to put in a word on behalf of the H. Brothers with M. O'B that would be perfectly in order, so long as a) you don't do it in writing and b) the press don't find out. **S.J.**

(PS. I would destroy this memo if I were you or people will think that you are up to no good which you are not of course, but you know how people talk.)

HINDUJA, BYERS AND VAZ

THE MARTIN SIXSMITH DOSSIER

by Martin Sixmillionwordsmith

(continued from page one)

which made it clear that the DTLR line on the CGT issue had been severely compromised.

Saturday 10.45 am

Am phoned by Chris Hoohy, DPPS to the assistant head of the MLQR. He is incensed by the paperclip fiasco.

CH: If you don't sort this out, Martin, there is going to be hell to pay. We have a real problem here.

MS: I hear what you say, Chris, but it's not that easy. Paperclips are a nuclear issue round here and I'm not going to be part of the stationery meltdown when it comes.

CH: I'm going to refer this upwards, Martin. I can't afford not to. This decision would prove fateful.

Saturday 12.45

Am rung by Deirdre Dull, deputy spokesperson on photocopying provision in the DTLR.

MS: Where are you, Deirdre?

DD: I'm on the train.

MS: You're breaking up, Deirdre.

DD: What?

MS: I said, you're breaking up, Deirdre.

DD: Say again.

MS: Where are you? Hello? Hello?

This was to be the turning point in the whole paperclip affair and *(continued for hundreds of pages)*

COURT CIRCULAR

GOSFORD PARK

Their Royal Highnesses the Earl and Countess of Wessex will be receiving a cheque from Her Majesty the Queen for £1 million. This will be followed by their immediate retirement from professional life. The Earl has graciously agreed not to film his nephew on the toilet and the Countess has consented not to discuss Royal matters with *News of the World* journalists dressed up as Sheikhs.

SOUTHFORK LODGE

The Duchess Fergiana is to relaunch herself in the pages of the *Hello!* magazine. Readers will discover that she is thinner than she was and is to embark on a new career of appearing in *Hello!* magazine and telling everyone how thin she is.

HIGHGROVE

His Royal High the Prince Harry will receive Inspector Knacker of the Drugs Squad, who will graciously grant him a Royal Pardon. He will then celebrate with a number of pints of snakebite with the Inebriate-in-Waiting the Honourable Guy Perry Worsthorne.

ST ANDREWS

His Royal Highness the Prince of Hearts will attend a lecture at which he will get rather bored. He will then proceed to sit in his room feeling sorry for himself and watching afternoon television. He will then ring His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who will tell him "If you think *you're* bored, you should try being the Prince of Wales." A brief altercation will ensue, during which HRH the Prince William will say "It's *so* unfair" (© H. Enfield)

WOGGAWOGGALAND

His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh will meet a number of aboriginal gentlemen with spears. He will then follow time-honoured Royal tradition and will make an offensive remark about their modern-day role *(That's enough. Ed.)*

BYERS: NEW LIE

MUGABE SWEEPS TO VICTORY

by Our Man Not In Harare Because He's Been Killed

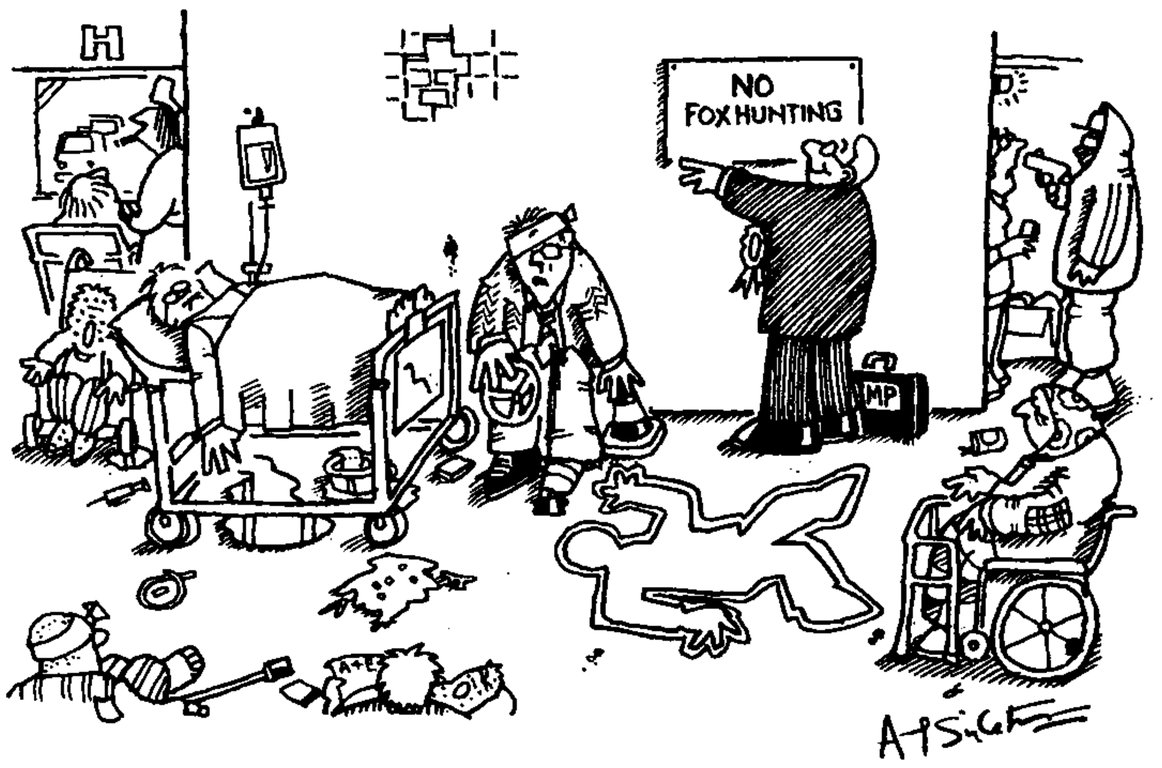
PRESIDENT Mugabe last night took the unusual step of issuing next month's election results in advance.

"This action is necessary," he told himself, "to stop the media misinterpreting the results to suggest that I did not win. The world will see that all is fair and above board and there was no need for any outside observers of the type who might have unfortunately been murdered if they had stayed."

Those Results In Full

His Supreme Holiness King Comrade Robert Mugabe I
(Democratic Freedom Party)
25 million (everyone)

The late Mr Morgan Tsvangirai
(Anti-Democratic Tool of Western Capitalists and CIA Party)
0 (nobody – which is just as well since he is unfortunately dead due to a bad cold)



Not the editor

AUSTRALIAN TO EDIT THE TIMES

by Our Media Staff **Peter Stopjob**

NEWS INTERNATIONAL announced last night that the new editor of the Times is to be an Australian who lives in New York.

The new appointee is a Mr Rupert Murdoch who has had a long and successful career in newspapers.

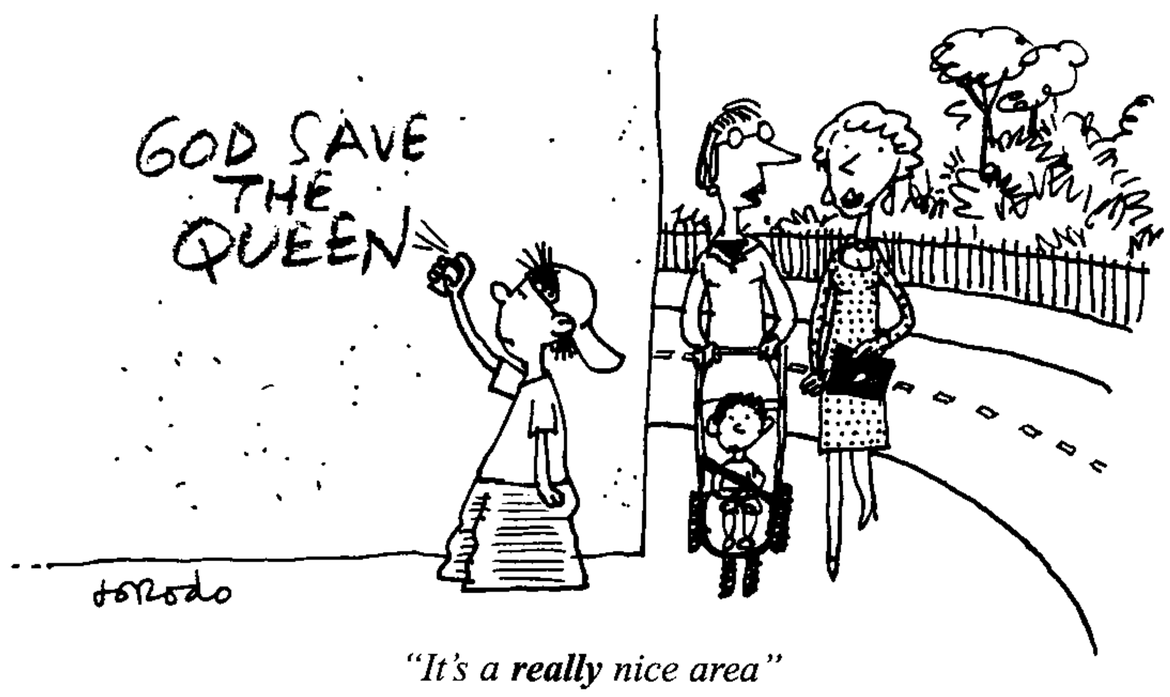
Murdoch is married to a Chinese woman and his interests include making money and selling newspapers.

Mr Murdoch succeeds the outgoing editor of the Times, Mr Rupert Murdoch, who is not stepping down after ten years.

The Chunderer

Paying tribute to himself, Mr Murdoch said: "Rupert has been a tremendous editor, taking the paper downmarket and desperately cutting the price in the hope that someone might buy it. I hope that I will be able to maintain the low standards that he has set for this once great newspaper."

The Dirty Digger is 107.



*"It's a **really** nice area"*

Late News

LONDON TRAFFIC CHARGES LATEST

KEN LIVINGSTONE has confirmed that all drivers into Central London will soon be forced to hand over five pounds.

"What will happen as the driver approaches a certain set of traffic lights," the Mayor told reporters, "is that five scruffy individuals will leap out onto the road carrying a bucket of soapy water, a squeegee cloth and menacing expressions and unless you hand over the money after they clear your windscreen, they'll scratch the side of your car with a coin or let your tyres down.

"This new scheme really sums up my integrated transport plans for London in the 21st century." *(Reuters)*

RAIL UPDATE

THE Government today apologised to long-suffering rail commuters for the unexpected continued delays in the departure of Stephen Byers as Transport Minister.

"It's totally inexplicable, given everything he's botched up, how this could have f***ing happened," said a baffled senior department of transport... *(Cont. p. 94)*

TOP COMEDIAN DIES

ONE OF the country's best-loved comedians Mr Frank Skinner died on stage last night at the Brit Awards ceremony. Tributes poured in from no one.

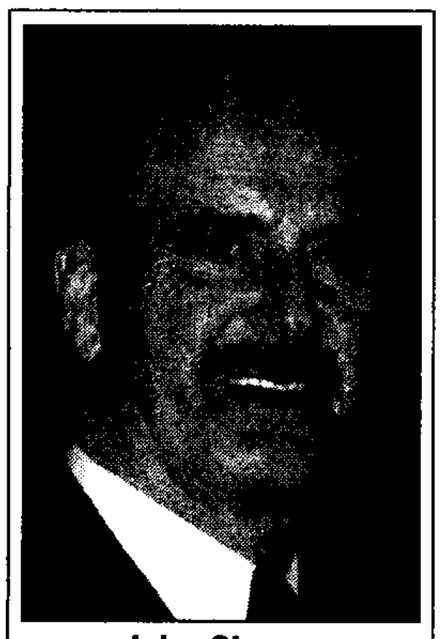
(Reuters)

BYERS TELLS TRUTH SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Andrew Marrvel**

WESTMINSTER was rocked to its foundations when it was revealed that Mr Stephen Byers had told the truth last night.

"I am a liar," he said.


John Cleese

PYTHON MAN DEAD

by Our Showbusiness Correspondent **Sheridan Beardie**

THE MAN who inspired the world's funniest ever television series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* has died, it was revealed today.

Said Python creator, Sir John Cleese, 75, "He was the inspiration to us all. If it had not been for him, Monty Python would not have been the funniest programme ever."

He continued, "We owe him a tremendous debt. Our humour was based on some of his jokes – though of course ours had a greater appeal, and became the funniest television series in the history of the world."

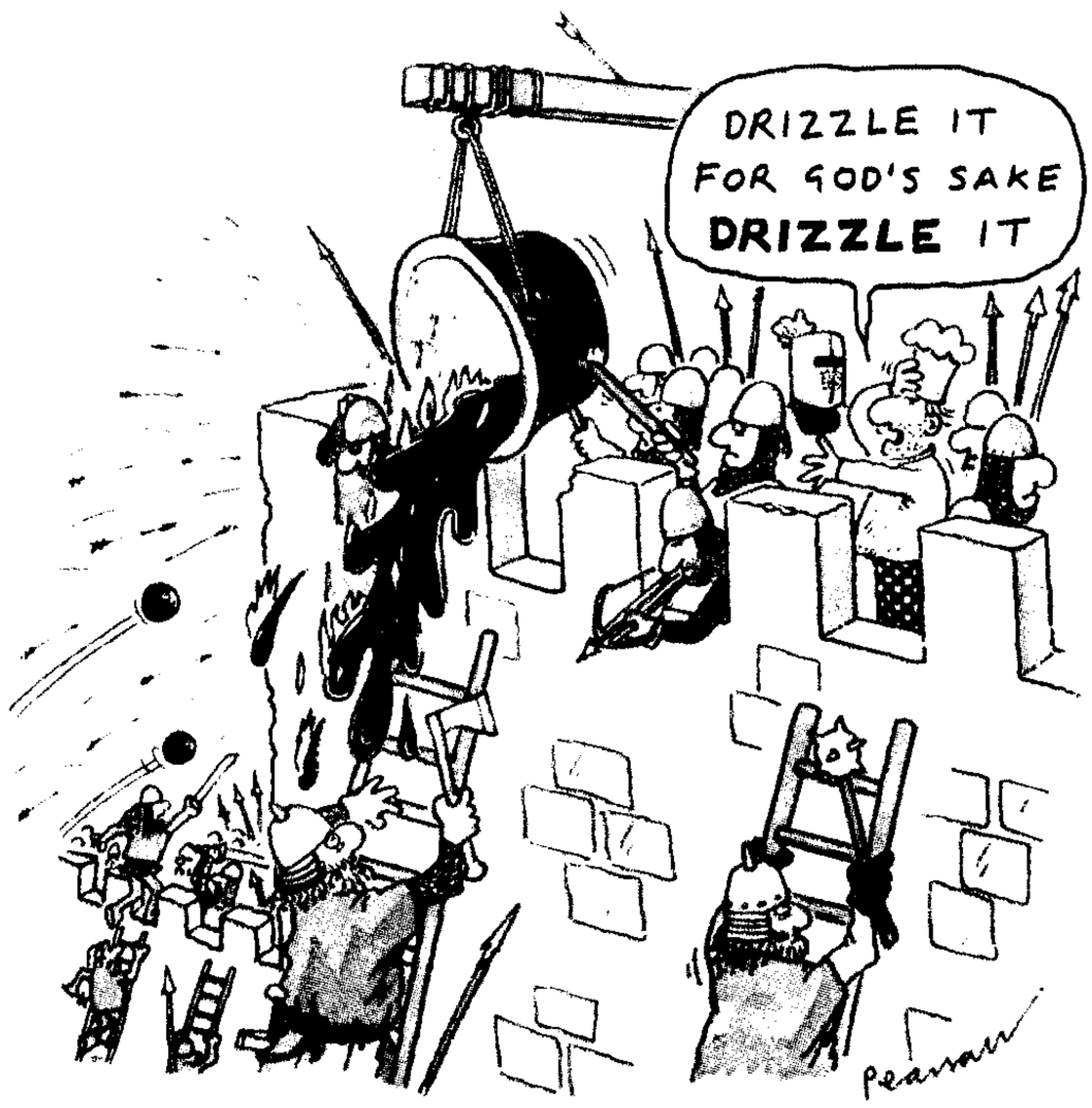
Terry Jones, 81, another of the Python legends, summed up the feelings of millions when he added, "Python marked a sea-change in the history of comedy. We broke the mould and there has never been anything like it before or since."

The Python Rib-Ticklers You'll Never Forget

The Lumberjack Song
I'm a lumberjack
And I'm OK

The Silly Walk Sketch
Man comes on and does silly walks.

The Dead Parrot Joke
Man In Shop: Yes?
Customer: This Spike Milligan is dead. *(That's enough Python. Ed.)*



POLLY FILLER

IT's an agonising decision and a very personal one which every parent who is a columnist must make. Shall I write a long piece about MMR, or not?

I've talked about it endlessly with my partner, the useless Simon, who is arguing that we shouldn't expose our son Charlie to unnecessary publicity.

Yet, on the other hand, I read the evidence that hundreds of other columnists have quite happily written about their children's MMR injections. They feel they have done the right thing.

So what should I do? I have a deadline. I have 800 words to write. A column on MMR would bring three benefits: a topical issue, a story with a personal angle, and a chance to annoy Simon and pay him back for watching the final of the Olympic Igloo-Building Competition live from Utah instead of taking me out to dinner on my birthday. But in the end there is only one choice I could honestly make: not to write about MMR at all.

© Polly Filler.

'CRUEL' HUNTING TO BE OUTLAWED

by **Robert Fox and John Peel**

THE GOVERNMENT revealed new plans this week to introduce a Bill into Parliament that will make the hunting of sleaze illegal in Great Britain.

Said the Prime Minister, "We want the dogs to be called off. It's time that a civilised society stopped hounding us. The spectacle of Stephen Byers being torn to pieces is cruel and must surely be unacceptable to government-lovers. Anyone caught hunting sleaze in the future will be liable to a large fine, imprisonment or possibly death."

Do You Ken John Prescott?

Opponents of the Bill, however, claim that sleazy ministers are little more than vermin who must be controlled.

"They are sly, cunning and ruthless," said one Master of the Sleaze Hounds (Sir Charles Moore of the Telegraph Pack), "and besides, it's bloody good fun. Tory Ho!"

Exclusive To All Newspapers

KYLIE'S BUM!

Pages 1-93

India, Palestine, Zimbabwe, Iraq: War Death Famine Plague p. 94

"Have you met my performance targets?"

DAILY REGISTER

In Today's New-Look 'Register' Section of Private Eye

New 40-page Obituary Section

Uri Bagel, Israeli housing minister under Golda Meir, 1949-51; **Hermoine De La Marr**, Hollywood actress who starred in "Shoot Out At Bridges Rock" (1937) and "Gun Fever" (1943); **Sir Wilton Carpet**, former Governor General of the Gilbert and George Islands 1954-6; **Sayonara Bunjibar**, leader of Uhafi, the breakaway liberation movement in Rumbabwe (formerly British Rumbabaland); **Arnos Grove Jr**, tenor saxophonist with the Teddie Kettle Swing Orchestra, 1936-41; and hundreds of other people you've never heard of until now.

Debate@theeye.co.uk

Readers log on to the vital topics of the day. Today: Whither wind power?; Is obesity a crime?; Why is the Times so boring?

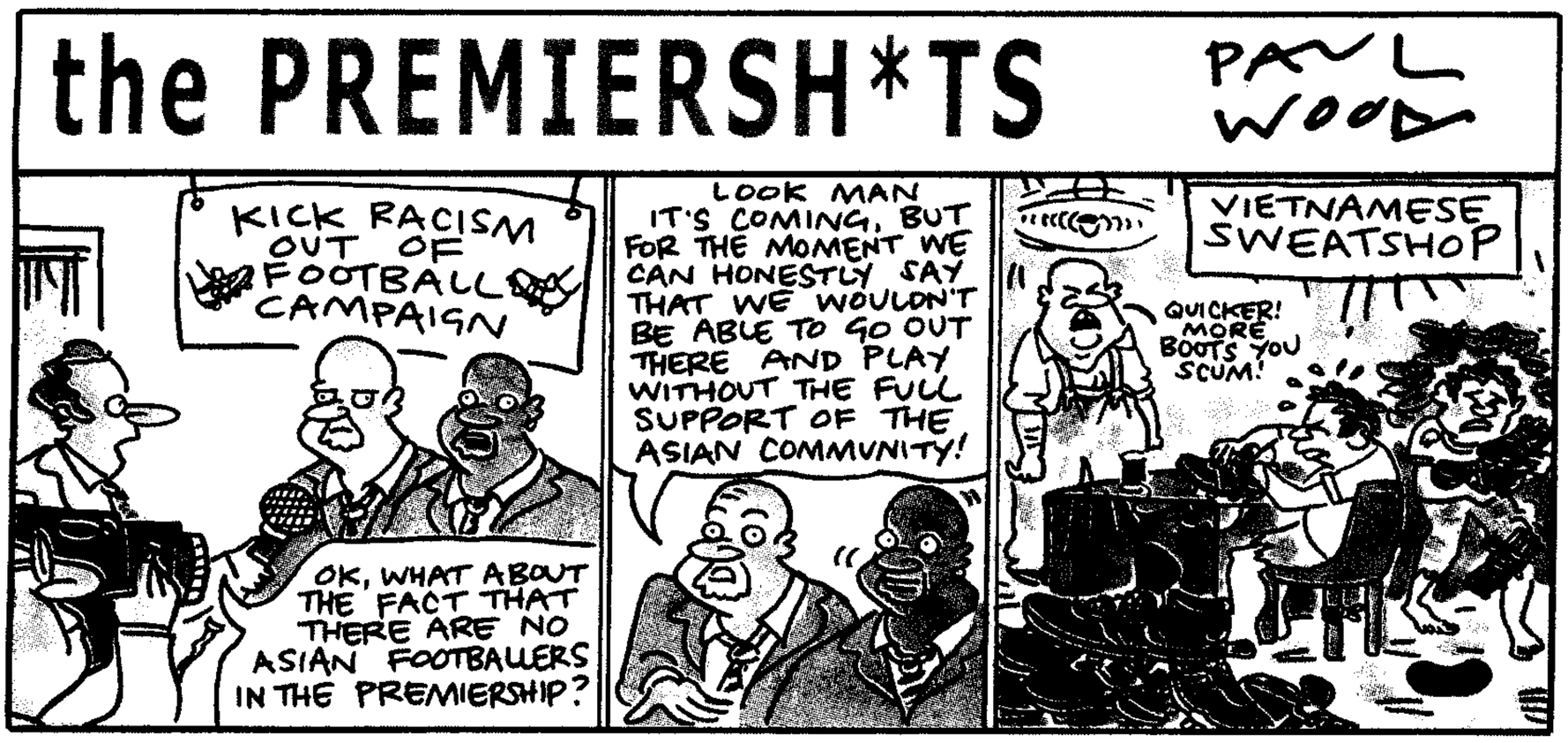
ON THIS DAY

26 May 1927 – Is the Airship The Transport of the Future? by Our Airship Correspondent

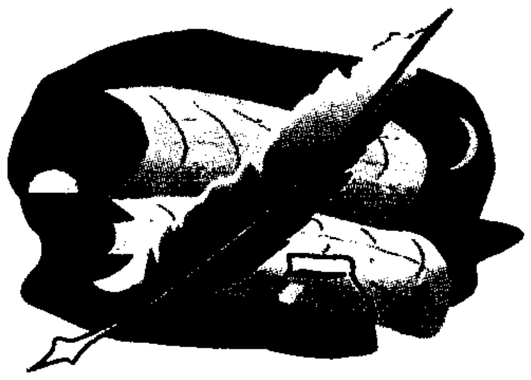
PLUS

Court Circular, Today's Birthdays, Church Appointments and Hundreds of Other Items Too Dull To Mention

Right between the Business and the Sport in the exciting 2nd section that you leave on the train.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOD
KICK RACISM OUT OF FOOTBALL CAMPAIGN
OK, WHAT ABOUT THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO ASIAN FOOTBALLERS IN THE PREMIERSHIP?
LOOK MAN IT'S COMING, BUT FOR THE MOMENT WE CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO GO OUT THERE AND PLAY WITHOUT THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE ASIAN COMMUNITY!
VIETNAMESE SWEATSHOP
QUICKER! MORE BOOTS YOU SCUM!

WASHINGTON DIARY



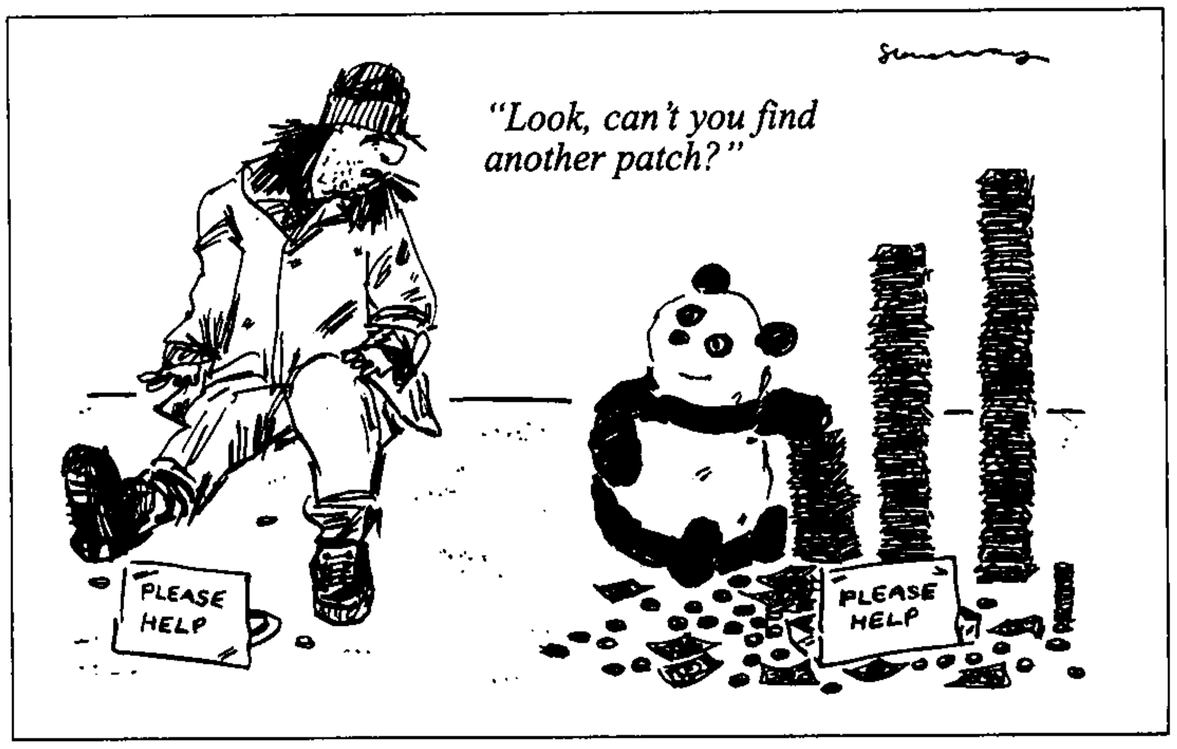
CHARLES MOORE

Last week I went to Washington, which is the capital of the free world. I was very honoured to be granted a five-minute interview with Mr Rumsfeld, who is one of the most important people in the world. He quickly demonstrated why he has the reputation for having one of the finest minds since Einstein. I asked him if Osama bin Laden was still alive. "I can only answer that, Mr Bore, in two ways. Either he is, or he ain't." I thought how grateful we should all be that the destinies of mankind are in such safe hands.

I had dinner with my very old friends Don and Donna Frumsfeld.

He is one of the sharpest minds in Washington, and is credited with coining the now immortal phrase "Let's kick ass". Not since Churchill *(cont'd. p. 94)*

(Reprinted without permission from the Daily Spectatorgraph)



Noel and Chambers now discovered that the old Broom Dance was still performed at Harvest rime and on other festive occasions at the Carpenter's Anus in Newbiggen Street; *The Morris Dancer*

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(Han-z-z-z-ard – sponsored by Mittal [Dutch Antilles] plc. Motto: "It's a Steel!")

3.17 pm. Trade & Industry Questions

Mrs Toreeza Nogood (Virginia Bottom, Con): Would the Secretary of State agree that, in the light of this truly disgraceful behaviour, he should jolly well resign?

(Tory cheers)

Iain Duncan Donuts (Wheen, Con): I say, jolly well said Theresa, cough, cough.

(Tory cheers and coughs)

Mr Stephen Lyers (Pants-On-Fire, Lab): I have no intention of resigning, now or at any other time. I have been told by the Prime Minister that I must apologise for any lies I may inadvertently have told, but I must make it clear that I have not told any, and, even if I had, so what? Let's stop all this asking silly questions about whether I've told lies or not, and get back to the real business of this government, which is banning fox-hunting.

(Labour cheers)

Mrs Nogood: Is there *anything* that will make you resign, you horrid man?

Mr John Prescott (Two Jags, Lab): Shut yer bloody face, yer fat slag!

(Hysterical Labour cheers and laughter at this outstanding example of modern parliamentary wit)

The Speaker (Mr Mick Gorbals): Och aye, yer bloody Tory houri, John's richt the nicht.

(Labour cheers and laughter at this outstanding example of parliamentary impartiality by Mr McSpeaker)

Charles Wannabe (Glenfiddich, Lib-Dem): Would the Secretary of State agree that, in the light of his truly disgraceful behaviour, he should jolly well resign?

Mrs Nobody: Hey, that's what I said!

(Lib-Dem cheers, Labour boos, Tory coughs)

Mr Lyers: Run, run, as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm Tony's man!

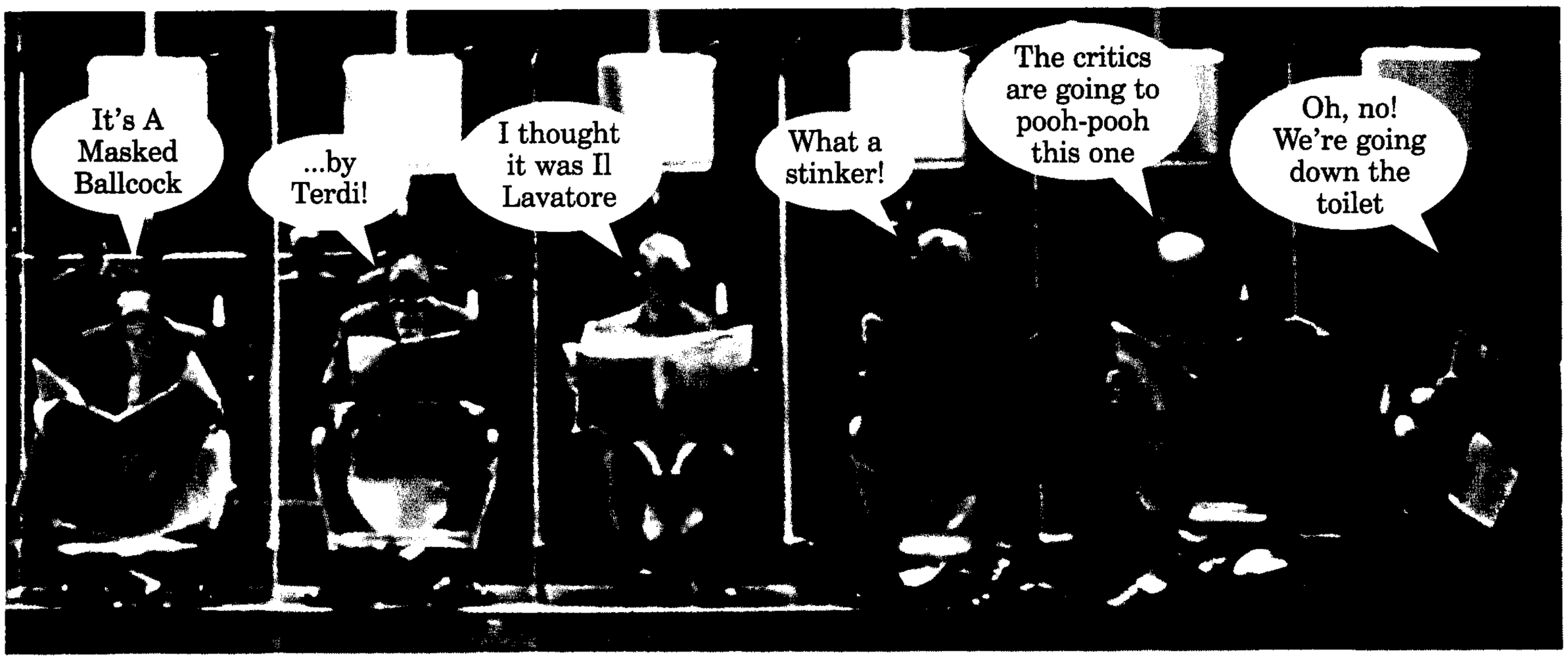
(Labour erupts in spontaneous demonstration of support for Mr Lyers's superb handling of all problems affecting Britain's transport system)

Mr Norman Baker (Boring-on-Thames, Lib-Dem): Can I ask the Prime Minister...

Mr J. Prescott: No, you bloody well can't, because he's not here.

(House adjourns for weekend, since it is Tuesday)

ENO TRIUMPH – NIGHT AT THE PLOPERA


It's A Masked Ballcock
...by Terdi!
I thought it was Il Lavatore
What a stinker!
The critics are going to pooh-pooh this one
Oh, no! We're going down the toilet

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Inspector Morse (aka John Thaw)

So. Farewell then
John Thaw,
Known to millions
As Inspector
Morse.

"Lew-is!" That was
Your catchphrase.

Many readers have pointed out
The uncanny prescience of
My last poem
When I asked "Who
Will be the next TV detective
To go
After Stratford Johns
(Inspector Barlow
Of Z Cars fame)
And Barry Foster
(Inspector Van der Valk)?"

Dit-dit-dit
Da-da-da
Dit-dit-dit
That was your theme tune.

Whereas Barlow's was
Da-da-da
Di-dum-dum-dum-dum
And Van der Valk's
Was
Da-da-da-da
Dadada
Da-da-da-da-da,
As I pointed out
In my last two
Poems.

Endeavour J. Thribb (17½)

NAVAL SCRABBLE

World of Soccer

BIG RON PICKS 'THE NEASDEN CLASSICS' CD

by **E.I. Erewego** Our Man In The Virgin Record Store With The Ear-Plugs And The Avocado-'n'-Custard Sarnie

TIGHT-LIPPED Neasden soccer supremo Ron Knee, 59, has put together his favourite pieces of classical music for a special CD to promote the North Circular World Cup Trophy.

Big Ron, 59, told reporters, "It has given me hours of pleasure to select my all-time classical favourites and I hope millions of people will enjoy listening to them for the first time, as I have done."

Symphony Number Sven

That Ron Knee Collection in full:

- You'll Never Walk Alone (Elgar)
- Nice One, Cyril (Delius)
- Aria: 'E I Addio' from Mozart's Don Revianni

Already the fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) have given the CD their thumbs up. "We shall definitely be thinking of buying the set. It's great value at £29.99," said Sid.

LATE SCORE

Brahms Academicals 7

Schubert Wanderers 3

That MARIANNE FAITHFULL Interview

A Lord Gnome Digest Service

Marianne Faithfull... great survivor... 60s icon... Mick Jagger... As Tears Go By... convent education... Hungarian mother... great survivor... Mick Jagger... Mars Bar... drugs... alcohol... more drugs... survivor... *(That's enough interview. Ed.)*

Digital TV Listings (ITV2)

Wednesday 6 March

The World's Scarlest Audience Figures 7.30pm

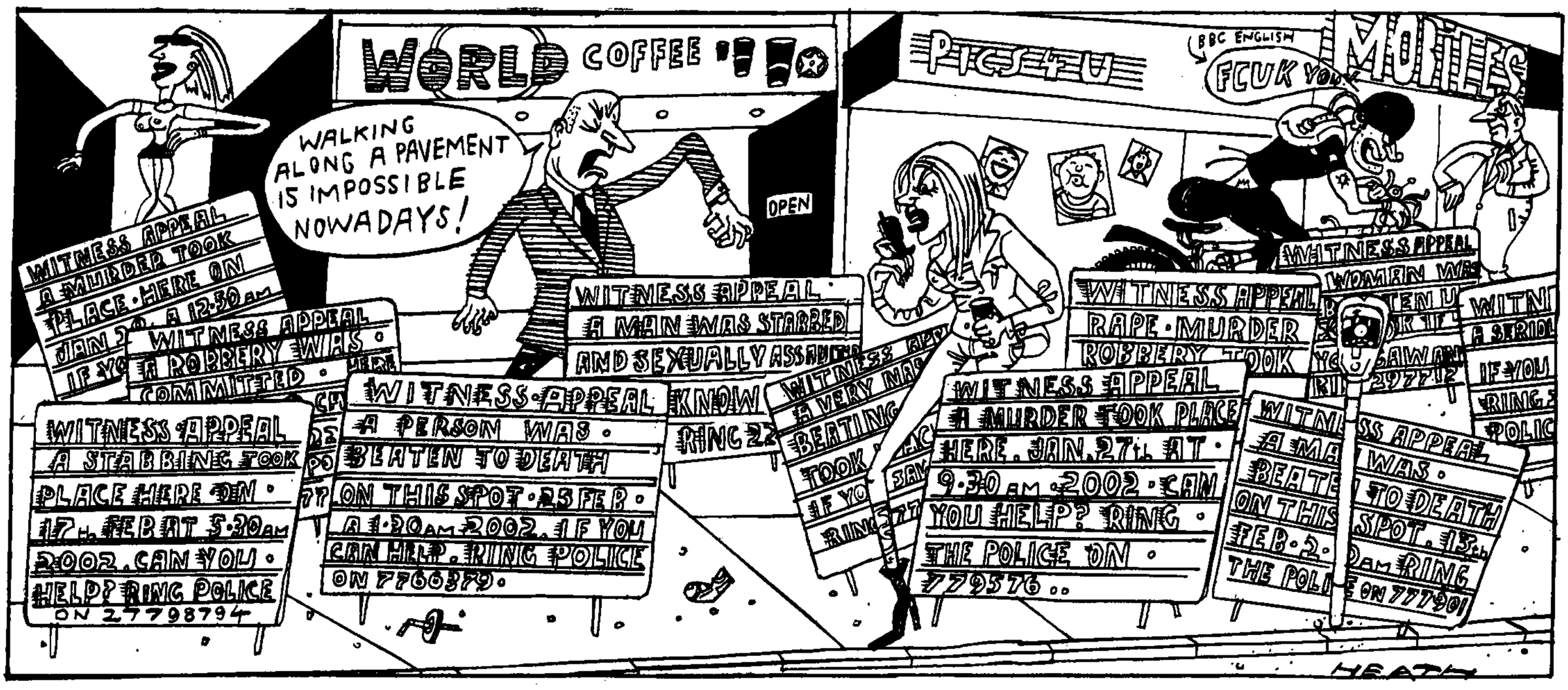
Gasp with astonishment as the ITV2 bosses see their station crash and burn in the latest ratings.

When Bailiffs Attack 8.00pm

Employees recount their terrifying experiences of what happens when burly unshaven men come to take the chrome and leather chairs out of ITV2's foyer.

It Shouldn't Happen To A... Digital TV Station 8.30pm

More hilarious clips of ITV executives throwing themselves out of very high windows.


WORLD COFFEE
WALKING ALONG A PAVEMENT IS IMPOSSIBLE NOWADAYS!
OPEN
PICS 4 U
BBC ENGLISH
FCUK YOU
MORTICIANS
WITNESS APPEAL A MURDER TOOK PLACE HERE ON JAN 27 AT 12.30 AM IF YOU
WITNESS APPEAL A ROBBERY WAS COMMITTED
WITNESS APPEAL A STABBING TOOK PLACE HERE ON 17th FEB AT 5.30AM 2002. CAN YOU HELP? RING POLICE ON 2779879
WITNESS APPEAL A PERSON WAS BEATEN TO DEATH ON THIS SPOT 23 FEB AT 1.30AM 2002. IF YOU CAN HELP RING POLICE ON 7766379
WITNESS APPEAL A MAN WAS STABBED AND SEXUALLY ASSAULTED KNOW RING 22
WITNESS APPEAL A MURDER TOOK PLACE HERE JAN 27th AT 9.30 AM 2002 CAN YOU HELP? RING THE POLICE ON 779576
WITNESS APPEAL RAPE MURDER ROBBERY TOOK
WITNESS APPEAL WOMAN WAS
WITNESS APPEAL A MAN WAS BEATEN TO DEATH ON THIS SPOT 15th FEB AT 2AM RING THE POLICE ON 777901
HEATH

Coming Soon

A NOT VERY BEAUTIFUL MIND

TOP PHYSICIST John Nash plays the troubled actor genius Russell Crowe in this moving Hollywood biopic. Crowe is one of the most feted actors of his generation, yet beneath the surface has serious mental problems which turn him into a raging psychopath whenever anyone crosses him. He finally breaks down at an awards ceremony, reading out poems, telling a BBC producer that he "will never work in Hollywood again" and demanding "respect" on the grounds that he is an actor with a beard.

Will he conquer his insanity and be saved by the love of a lot of different women and pick up a Nobel Prize For Acting? No, of course not.

Eye Rating: Bonkers

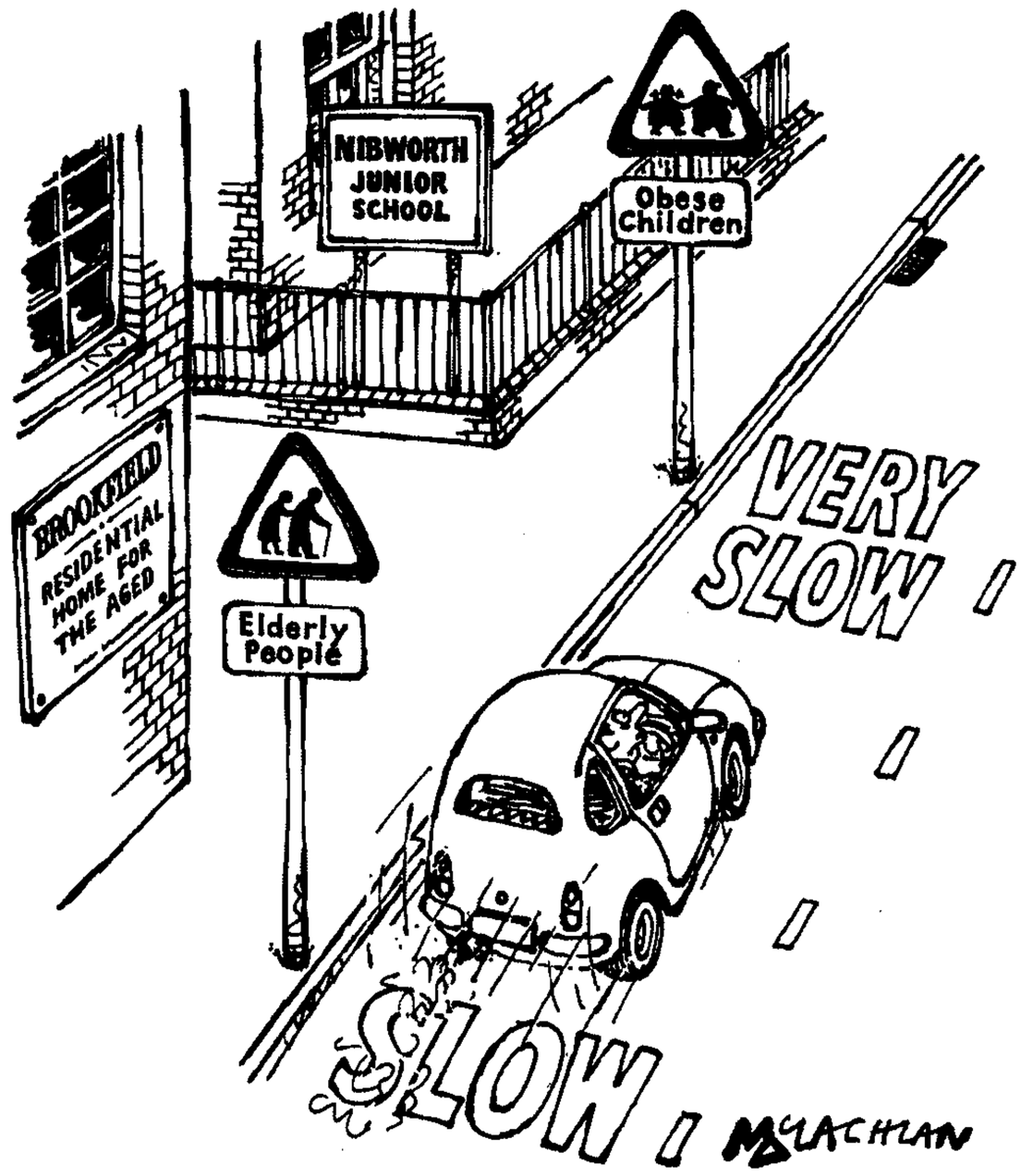
Late News

DAME JUDI *NOT* IN FILM — PUBLIC OUTRAGED

A MAJOR film was released yesterday not featuring Dame Judi Dench. The producers apologised and promised it would not happen again.

(Reuters)

"The choo-choo train's going into the tunnel... oh no, it's stopped again"



NEW BBC SERIES

Yes, F****** Minister

(Scene: The minister's private office at the Department of Transport. Door opens, and Sir Humphrey enters.)

Sir Humphrey Mottram: Good f****** morning, minister.

Minister: What the f*** do you want?

Sir Humphrey: We're f****** f*****, minister.

Minister: You mean to say we're f****** f*****?

Sir Humphrey: Yes, f****** minister.

Minister: F*** me!

Ends

CAST IN FULL

Sir Richard Mottram	**All G.**
The Minister	**Stephen Fryers**
Martin Sixsmith	**Himself**
Jo Moore	**Barbara Windsor**

Produced by Quentin Tarantino

We apologise to Martin Cotton, author of January's BBC File: a reference to Peter Pears's 'vowels' should instead have been to his 'bowels'.

BBC Music Magazine

SPOONS: As a collector of spoons from different places I have often wondered if there was a collective given name for this, and quite by accident I came across the name for the collection of spoons. For anyone, who like me, collects them the name is Cochleary.

Sussex Express

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

NO. 94 SUE MACGREGOR

As someone who is more used to the business of asking questions, how does it feel, for once, to be on the receiving end, in this case on the subject of spoons?

I notice that you are a man asking these questions? They wouldn't have sent a woman to do one of the big spoon interviews.

I suppose in the Today studio you were used to dealing with a lot of spoons?

Oh, yes. I suppose everyone remembers the famous occasion when Jim was interviewing Sir Norman Fowler, and he accidentally banged his coffee spoon on the microphone. We had a lot of calls about that one, I can tell you!

Now that you've got more time on your hands, since you retired from the Today programme, will you be sleeping with any more men?

It's not really true that I'm retiring. I shall still be doing lots of interviewing work, and of course I'm very busy promoting my book. So I am not sure whether I will be able to devote as much time to spoons as I would like. As a single woman you really have to focus on your priorities in order to achieve anything. And that's as true of spoons as it is of getting to the top in broadcasting.

Did anything amusing ever happen to you in bed with Robin Day?

No. Can we stop focusing on all this trivia, please, and return to the important issue of spoons?

No.

NEXT WEEK: Iain Duncan Smith – *"Me And My Comb".*

DIARY

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Hey, love the way you say "Wooh". Fantastic!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: There she goes again! Wooh! It's contagious! That means it's sort of catching!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Tell you what, Zoe. That Jordan, eh? Talk about Big Bazookas!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Last time I saw Bazookas that big was on...well, on Jordan actually!!!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Now we've got something so special for you it's more special than you can possibly imagine, it's that special. Ladies and Gentlemen, please give it up for....KYLIE!!!!

KYLIE: *Lalalalalalala*
lalalalalalala
lalalalalalala
Yajis cairn gitchew adderma yed
Yajis cairn gitchew adderma yed
Yajis cairn gitchew adderma yed
lalalalalalala
lalalalalalala
lalalalalalala

ZOE BALL: WOOH!

FRANK SKINNER: Classic! Classic! Didja see that pert bum on Kylie, didja? Classic!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Now to introduce the nominations for Consignia/ Nuclear Fuels Best International Top Selling Artist with a Name Ending in Y, we have a woman who I'll always think of for giving of her BREAST – whoops! silly me! I meant to say giving of her BEST – honest!! – yes, a warm nipple – I mean RIPPLE! – of applause for DARRYL HANNAH!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Mmmm. You're looking lovely, Darryl.

DARRYL HANNAH: Hi.

FRANK SKINNER: As I say, you're looking lovely. Really lovely.

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Fabulous. Right. Yes. Well. Really lovely. Erm.

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

THE BRIT AWARDS

FRANK SKINNER: Really great. So, perhaps you should tell us who won. Erm.

DARRYL HANNAH: And the nominations for the Sainsbury Supersaver Best International Top Selling Spicy Condiments Artist with a Name Ending with Y are: Shaggy, Baggy, Haggy, Draggy, and Saggy. And the winner is... yes... SHAGGY!

ZOE: Wooh!

SHAGGY: *Gotta finda solu-sharn*
To whirl revolu-sharn
And get a comfy cush-sharn
And sit on it to avoid confu-sharn!

SHAGGY: Wow! First of all I want to thank everybody who made it all possible that's Brian and Ray and Miles my personal trainer and Jim and Geoff in the office and Reg my driver and Graham and Dana in charge of the jewellery and Julie and then there's Ray in Accounts and Stuart my lawyer and Terry who's in charge of my Property Portfolio and Mike my Stockbroker and not forgetting everybody in Personnel specially Sue and Geoff, or did I just say Geoff, and my Mum and Dad and sister June and Dave and all the helicopter crew, and and Pam and Nigel and the rest of my household, outdoor and leisure centre staff and the whole HOT SHOT REVOLU-SHARN MASSIVE!!!

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Yes. Right. Um. Yes. Now to introduce the nominations for HSBC Gold MasterCard Best International World Banking Act, please give it up for the mean and moody Mr Russell CROWE!

RUSSELL CROWE: Whatdyou feckin mean by that you feckin little fecker, tek ep yeh feckin airse, mite.

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Great! It's a great joy to meet you, Russ! Yes! So let's have the winner. Erm.

RUSSELL CROWE: And the winner is... So Sullied Crew!

SO SOLID CREW: *Yo yo yo yo die*
no no no no cry
wo wo wo wo why
bo bo bo bo hi
lo lo lo lo lo sky
so so so so bye!

ZOE BALL: WOOH!

FRANK SKINNER: Not too long 'til the end now. Fabulous! Should be off in under the hour! Great! Did you see the boobs on those dancers, didja? Talk about globe artichokes, eh? Eh?

ZOE BALL: Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Great knockers! And I'm not talkin' 'bout the type you get on doors sometimes instead of an electric bell in kind of old-fashioned houses! Anyway. Right. Um. Yes. To introduce the man who has achieved the Montsanto Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Achievement in Achieving Outstanding Achievement, please re-re-re-welcome – KYLIE!!!

KYLIE: *Lalalalalalalalalala*
Yajis cairn gitchew adderma yed
Yajis cairn gitchew adderma yed

KYLIE: This is a guy who has sold more than 100 million records at over £15 each from all the people around the world, regardless of race, colour and creed, grossing a remarkable £1500 million worldwide for his record company – Ladies and Gentlemen, give it up for...STING!

STING: I just wanna say one thing to all you struggling no-hopers out there – always remember that MUSIC IS ITS OWN REWARD!

STING: *Freefree, setme free*
Freefree, setme free
Freefree, setme free
Freefree, setme free

ZOE BALL: WOOH! Wooh!

FRANK SKINNER: Can I go home now?

As seen by
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

ANYONE CAN PRACTICE IT. YOU DON'T NEED EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT OR CLOTHES. JUST A LITTLE MAT...
IT'S A GREAT WAY OF RELAXING AND TONING YOUR BODY AND IT'S REALLY GOOD EXERCISE TOO...
GREAT!
SO HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN INTO YOGA, GARY?
YOGA?
I'M TALKING ABOUT 'TWISTER', LOVE. YOU SHOULD TRY IT...
OH.

Literary Review

Another load of old Tat-ler

Godchildren
Nicholas Coleridge
(Orion, £12.99)

Editor's note: Given the number of Nicholas Coleridge's chums who have already reviewed this book, in the interest of objectivity we invited Coleridge to write this review himself.

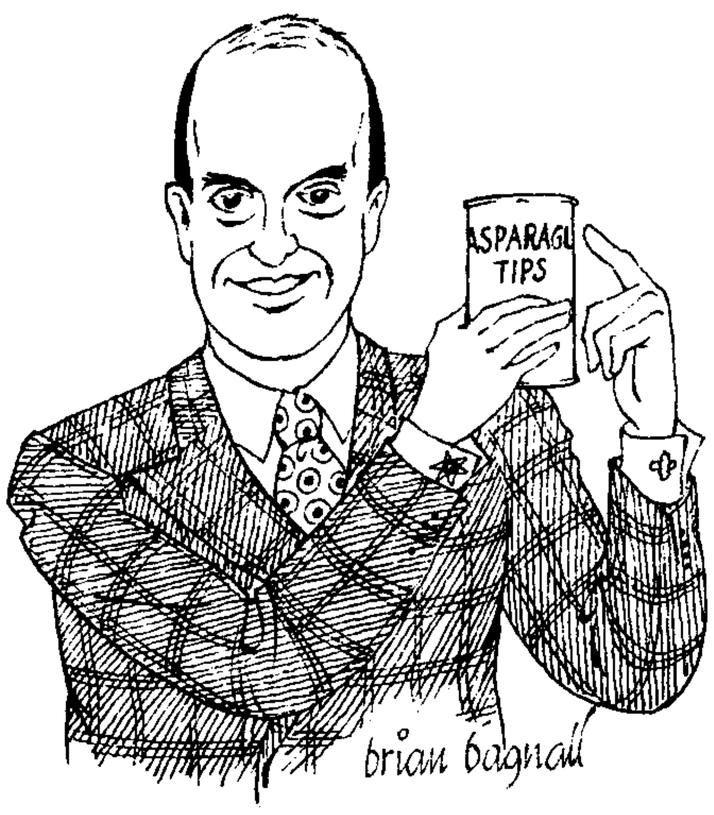
DARLINGS! I expect that, plucking this buxom 595 pager from the shelf at Harrod's or Heywood Hill or wherever you buy your books, you'll wonder quite where I find the time. Well, yes, it is a pretty glamorous and demanding job that one does, and I don't mind telling you that sometimes, creeping down from my office late at night to the subs' desk at Tatler to reassure myself that the photo of the Dowager Marchioness of Haym and Eigg has gone in the right way up, I wonder myself.

Actually, I don't mind saying that this new one of mine is frightfully subtle. It is, though. It all starts back in the 1960s – a truly dreadful decade, as I'm sure you won't need reminding – with this enigmatic tycoon named Marcus Brand (and didn't they giggle in Mark's when I told them about him!) He doesn't have any children himself, but there are six godchildren in whose lives he busily interferes for the next third of a century. By this time the money's all running out and they sort of gang up on him, but don't let me spoil it for you.

And of course, it's not just an extraordinary epic about love, money, power and revenge, oh dear me no. Frankly, I know my public expects a bit better than that, and I'm the man to give it to them. No, times are changing, as all of us high-powered media folk well know, and so I've had to cast my social net pretty wide.

Jamie and Charlie are nice Eton boys, even if the money that Jamie represents is, well, a bit too recent to suit the purists among us. Abigail is a Jewish American Princess. Mary is a nice girl from Dorking, but – entre nous, of course – not quite out of the top drawer. Saffron is one of those delicious bohemians I've read about somewhere. Stuart, I'm afraid (Stuart!) is rather an oik, but you see I needed him for the plot. Quite a cross-section of society as I'm sure you'll agree, and I don't mind telling you that some of the research I had to do in connection with Stuart's upbringing in the backstreets of Smethwick, or somewhere, was painful in the extreme.

Oh well, off we go. Bali. Cap Ferrat. Place Vendome. Harry's Bar. Realising that many of you, alas,



won't have visited any of these really rather exclusive locations I've helpfully provided some of my famous descriptive passages. "The house in the Bahamas resembled something out of Gone With The Wind: a plantation building with a double-height portico supported by six white columns and a white cupola on the roof." There, now we all – even poor Stuart, who stares at this with wide-eyed wonder – know where we are. But, as I said, I'm afraid my horizons stretch a bit further than these pretty gazetteers.

History is moving on, you see, and Marcus is moving with it. Industrial unrest. Mrs Thatcher. The Lawson boom. It's all there, all garnished with the gayest little bits of period detail. "Celebrate... come on!" That's what they used to sing at Juanita's discotheque in the late 1970s. I know, because I rang up my friend Chas who used to go there in the vacs from Eton and asked him.

But back to the broad horizons. I don't know if any of you remember, but something over 20 years ago a couple of super friends of mine published a fascinating volume called The Sloane Ranger Handbook. Standards were slipping, you see – Hush Puppies on the Mall, the Times hatches and matches full of people with names like "Wayne" and "Gary" – and it was time to drag them back. Two decades on I rather congratulate myself that I've been able to offer a timely reminder of What Really Matters, How to Behave and the kind of outlook that even now helps to make civilised society what it is.

Consequently I've gone through Godchildren putting in all sorts of unobtrusive but wholly necessary advice to those of you confused by all the dreary meritocratic nonsense one sees around one. Quite early on, for example, I make Marcus give the children a most instructive lecture on how to eat asparagus ("...use your fingers, never those frightful tongs they try and give you in restaurants, and never, ever a knife and fork.") Then there are those essential questions that even the Daily Telegraph seems to have forgotten how to address. Does Peter Jones open on Saturdays? Where does a gentleman get his hair cut? Where can one buy a decent shirt? (The answers, by the way, are "Yes", "George at Trufit & Hill" and "Turnbull & Asser", and if you didn't know I suggest you write them down.) People don't seem to realise that finding a prep school 40 minutes drive from South Eaton Place and within striking distance of the Bell at Aston Clinton and the Compleat Angler at Marlow is a serious problem, and so I've provided several helpful suggestions.

Looking back, I can truthfully say that it was an absolute pleasure to provide this public service, occupied as I am in checking the captions for last month's truly divine cocktail party held by the Dowager Duchess of Rhum and Butter. And remember – there is, as my old nanny Mrs Turveydrop used to say, no such thing as snobbery; there is merely a correct way to behave and an incorrect one. There may not, in these demotic twenty-first century days, be many of us left, but I can assure you that, rather like mysterious, disappearing Marcus, we don't intend to give up without a fight.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
REST ASSURED, OUR PRINCESS MARGARET BOOK WON'T BE CHEAP AND TACKY
'SHE TOOK POT AND COKE'
MARGARET THE LAST REAL PRINCESS
BY NOEL BOTHAM-OF THE BARREL
IT'LL BE EXPENSIVE AND TACKY!
PRINCESS MARGARET - THE UNTRUE STORY

Puritan jerk ethic

White Mice
Nicholas Blincoe
(Sceptre, £10.99)

HANDS UP who remembers the New Puritans? Strange to think that it was less than two years ago that literary fiction was shaken to its core by a group of inky-fingered young radicals promising "to blow the dinosaurs out of the water".

It was a pair of authors named Nicholas Blincoe and Matt Thorne who chose to lead the headline-grabbing shocktroop. In their anthology *All Hail the New Puritans* they laid down a 10-point manifesto for future fiction which they handed to all their favourite authors (who happened to be their best buddies too). The rules – no authorial intervention, no fancy rhetoric, no flashbacks, nothing historical – made it pretty clear that Nick and Matt were trying to do to Mart and Salman exactly what they in turn had done to Iris and Kingsley in the early 80s. At last the books pages had something to get excited about.

Then came the persecution. Thorne's next novel was ripped to shreds by a piqued literary establishment. The New Puritans responded by closing rank and only reviewing each other's books. Since this modest Scriblerus-style kerfuffle petered out, the much-feted Alex Garland has still not produced another novel. Blincoe has taken a year and a half to come up with his latest 250 pages.

Reading what he's produced, it's hard to believe that this level of mediocrity had the gall to set itself at the helm of a supposed "new wave". In *All Hail the New Puritans* Blincoe and Thorne assembled several interesting young writers and, with their constrictive diktats, forced them to produce several middling short stories. Applying the same straitjacket to a full-length novel like *White Mice* merely prolongs the agony – Blincoe's gimmick-credo stifles every sentence.

The puritan rules demanded clarity, textual simplicity, grammatical purity. What's left is threadbare comparatives, flat characterisation and emasculated prose: if a decent book is a full meal, this is a rusk. Faced with such literal clunkers as "He is actually rubbing his hands together" (character is excited) "I think my mouth just falls open" (character is stunned) and again "my mouth is hanging open" (character is dumbstruck) one has to ask if this can be called writing at all. Blincoe is either an astonishingly poor wordsmith or, more likely, *All Hail the New Puritans* has proved to be a PR stunt that's become a gigantic albatross stapled to his neck.

The New Puritan manifesto would explain away such Peter-and-Jane penmanship with its proclaimed "dedication to the narrative form". As Blincoe said in the manual: "The most subtle and innovative form available is always going to be a plot-line." So how about this for a plot-line: Jamie is an

art student who'd quite like to study fashion. His sister's a messed-up model who likes her champagne and Columbian. He hooks up with her on the Paris fashion scene and there meets an ageing, fading international fashion designer – who decides to appoint Jamie as his deputy. Then Jamie has sex with his own sister. Interestingly, this is something that has happened before when they were younger... but we can't go into that because it's a code violation of New Puritan rules 5, 7, 8 and possibly 4. Then Jamie is arrested for murdering the fashion designer, although he can't have done it as at the time he was nobbing his sis. And that's it. As "subtle and innovative" plot-lines go it makes the A-Team look like high art.

It's tempting to continue punishing the book according to its own mandate and say, for example, that NP rule 9 ("We are moralists, so all texts feature a recognisable ethical reality") doesn't really stick when you're dealing with incest, murder, drugs and the fickle-thin world of fashion. It's hard to pin down just what the "recognisable ethical reality" is, with no authorial presence to guide you. The model-sister – coke, incest and all – seems pretty cool, earns money at the drop of a hat and gets away with it. Everyone is beautiful and obsessed with his or her appearance. The only discernible moral is that incest is best avoided, although when described as it is here even that sounds quite fun.

But why dwell on the manifest failings of a single novel when it's the underlying doctrine that is so obviously a sham? Those who recall what the old puritans did to churches should be aware that the new ones are doing it to books. The only consolation is that on the evidence of work like this, the old church – where good writers get to write as they see fit – should be re-established soon.

Books & Bookmen

■ DOES the PR department at Orion books have no shame?

First the new novel by Condé Nast MD Nicholas Coleridge was plugged in Condé Nast titles *GQ* and *Vogue* (see *Eye 1048*). Now snapshots from the great man's book launch are featured on Glamour.com, the website of Condé Nast's handbag-sized magazine.

"Publishing magnates, magazine editors and IT-girls converged on London's Met Bar to celebrate the launch of Condé Nast Managing Director Nicholas Coleridge's new epic, *Godchildren*," reads the blurb on the "Party People" section of the website, accompanied by glossy pictures of, er, Nicholas and Georgia Coleridge and their charming offspring, Sophie and Thomas.

■ HURRAH for Time Warner Books UK, as Little, Brown now wants to be known. In the search for the ultimate showbiz memoir, it has contrived to top the baffling six-figure sums paid by Century and Macmillan for Dale Winton and Bruce Forsyth respectively.

Staggeringly, editor Antonia Hodgson has paid a rumoured £800,000. Not for the autobiography of someone "hot" like George Clooney or Nicole Kidman... but for the deeply unglam actor and former agitator Ricky Tomlinson, last seen in the Royle Family, Brookside and several Ken Loach films no one can remember.

While Tomlinson is a good actor and has undoubtedly had an interesting life (he was jailed for his political beliefs back in the days when he was a militant union man), the burning question is: will his story be interesting enough to warrant 800 very large ones? My arse, as Jim Royle might say.

Because Tomlinson is almost unknown outside the UK, the chance of recouping on overseas editions is limited. Still, the company is sure to balance the books somehow. Madonna's Sex, originated by Time Warner US a decade ago, was the first part of a two-book deal worth around $5m, with the second part scheduled to be Madge's autobiography.

At the time, this seemed like an obscenely crazy amount of money; but Madonna's star has resolutely refused to wane, with the result that the deal now looks like a bargain. So much so that Madge's management has tried repeatedly to buy Time Warner out of the contract. Shrewdly, the multimedia combine has offered the Material Middle-aged Woman as much time as she wants to complete the manuscript.

■ WITH Waterstone's still in flux ("Are we floating? Who's buying us? Can I come to your party and meet your sister?"), parent company HMV Media seems to have taken advantage of the uncertainty to make personnel changes.

The recent departures of three regional managers have been followed by the exit of central London manager Lisa Milton (she opened the chain's Piccadilly "flagship"), and publicity manager Susan Limb.

The reason for Limb's exit is easy to see. While popular in the trade and an experienced bookseller, she was wholly unsuited to the PR job, which requires a thick skin and, at Waterstone's, consists mainly of fielding repetitive and largely unanswerable questions from City and trade press hacks about the future of the company.

Milton's leaving is less explicable, however. Admittedly Piccadilly didn't take off as head office had hoped, but given the handicaps of a very expensive location and pricey refit to pay off, Milton and team did

as well as anyone could have.

Meanwhile the main sponsor of Piccadilly, HMV Media CEO Alan "Weasel" Giles (the shop is known to many as "Giles' folly"), remains in his lucrative post, although nowadays he seems to be putting as much distance between himself and the bookselling business as is possible.

'Bookworm'

READERS COMPETITION

● CAN YOU find any more mistakes in the Oxford Companion To Twentieth Century British Politics, edited by John Ramsden?

Best so far are its recording of the editor of Private Eye as "Richard Hislop" and the left-wing Irish journalist and author Eamonn McCann as "Eamonn McCabe" – who is actually the current picture editor of the Guardian.

A prize will be awarded for the best entries (not a copy of the book).

Pseuds Corner

'Best is the enemy of good,' wrote Voltaire. While we may never be Picasso, Stravinsky, Voltaire, Astaire, Muhammed Ali, Tiger Woods or Mies van der Rohe, all of whom inhabit the upper reaches of Oympus, it is good to aspire to the best, even it is beyond our reach. That is my philosophy, at least, and is certainly one shared by Hildon – beyond doubt, the best of British mineral water.

LORD PALUMBO
The Hildon Magazine

I didn't want a 'lifestyle organizer', I wanted a wife. Carla at Ten UK is not precisely a wife, but she's the nearest thing to it. She has built up a clear picture of my likes and dislikes, my quirks and fancies, and whatever I ask her to do she does enthusiastically and imaginatively. When I wanted a party outdoors in the summer following my wedding, she was able to envisage just what I wanted and to source everything. She even sent me a CD of a singer when I was in California to ensure that the music was right. I think the service is first-rate. Ten UK free up my time by doing all the phoning around, and then they present me with a few well chosen alternatives. I recommend it to everyone, even my friends with wives!

Barrister M. KENNEDY-McGREGOR
Prompt: The Bar Services Company Magazine

Dr Merl Storr, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of East London
Business or Pleasure? Femininity and Consumption at Ann Summers Parties
What makes for a good 'girls night out'? This paper considers the structure and dynamics of gender identification and female bonding between heterosexual women. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Ann Summers party organisers in London and Essex to suggest a model of female homosociality structured by class, ethnicity, homoeroticism, rivalry and pleasure.

Lecture advertised by the Department of Sociology, University of Southampton

In J.K. Huysmans' novel *Against Nature*, the bible of the 1880s French Decadents, the world-weary hero Des Esseintes devotes himself to the cult of all that is artificial, unnatural and perverse in creation. He has a special fondness for plants that don't look like plants, but imitate the appearance of stone, paper, silk, rotting flesh. A hundred and forty years on, cinema has produced a work that would drive Des Esseintes wild, a film rich in tactile and wholly artificial surfaces, a very sampler of exotic textures for the sated aesthete.

JONATHAN ROMNEY, reviewing 'Monsters, Inc.' ***Independent on Sunday***

I suppose I have what the French refer to as *les signes exterieures de la richesse*; it's not exactly bling-bling, but I wear an old Rolex, and in winter my overcoat has a mink collar.

PHILIP HENSHER
Independent

Pseuds Corporate

The vision: a world of service-centric computing, where scalable, cost-effective information technology is delivered, metered, managed and purchased as a service. The goal: infrastructure on demand that's flexible, economical and always on.

Hewlett-Packard-Extra-News-UK
February 2002

CONTRIBUTORS: 'John and James', A. Goodfriend, M.J. Pemberton, John Ridenhauer, Tricia Nelson, Dan Ryntjes.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

HAVENS ABOVE

GETTING information from the Inland Revenue is always a tough business, but the *Eye* has had special problems trying to probe the growing links between the Revenue and the big accountants and banks whose main job is to avoid paying taxes and rip off the Revenue.

A request on 11 February for a list of "secondees" from private industry to the Revenue brought an answer on 19 February: a list of 13 secondees, mostly from professional tax avoiders like KPMG, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young. Further questions extracted the fact that most were members of an advisory group that no longer exists.

So the *Eye* tried again and at last got a list of real names of six secondees from big business. They are: Susan Wallis from Boots and Earlette Blake from BT, who are now working in the Revenue's human resources section; Lucy Chadwick and Tom Ground from Accenture (once Andersen Consulting) and now part of the Revenue's "quality public services team"; David Evans from KPMG, now working in the Revenue's "business tax" section; and Peter Mainds from Barclays Bank, now in the Revenue's enforcement office.

There are certain oddities in the lists. For instance, the first answer from the Revenue listed only one secondee from Accenture; the second lists two. Nor is there any mention of Anthony Davis, who has just joined the Revenue on a fixed appointment for a year fresh from the most artful of all tax avoiders, Ernst & Young.

Mr Davis now works in the business tax section, whose staff have been instructed to act as "champions for business" and where he will have to keep well clear of the recent warnings to tax inspectors to watch out for at least two schemes for blatant tax avoidance masterminded by, er, Ernst & Young.

Barclays Bank, which nurtured Peter Mainds, is also well known in the Revenue for its tricky avoidance schemes. As for KPMG, which produced David Evans, it was commissioned in 1999 by the government to produce an "independent" report on regulation in British dependencies in the Caribbean. The report drew loud acclaim from government ministers Melanie Johnson (Commons) and Baroness Scotland (Lords). But the warmest tribute came from the chief minister of the British Virgin Islands, the Hon Ralph O'Neal, who proclaimed that his government "welcomes this comprehensive report".

Implementing the (very mild) recommended regulations, he said, was "integral to the BVI's commitment to being in the top echelon of offshore financial services". The same sort of gushing praise was heaped on the KPMG report from the governments of the Cayman Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat. In all these places there was widespread relief that the British government, thanks to KPMG, would not embark on any of the reckless attacks on tax havens that some Labour enthusiasts had threatened.

A few months later, the confidence of the British government and its supporters in Caribbean tax havens was reinforced by the sale of £1bn of British tax offices to a company whose parent (audited, inevitably, by Arthur Andersen) is registered in the British Virgin Islands (see last *Eye*).

Despite the sale, however, and the praise from KPMG, the British Virgin Islands are still branded as harmful by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), of which Britain is a member. In November 2001 it published a list of 35 tax havens regarded as an international menace. Eleven of these have since made some commitment to make their tax regimes more transparent. The OECD's deadline for such commitments was 28 February. Among territories that have not met the deadline are the British Virgin Islands.

A GAME OF ELECTRONIC TAGGING

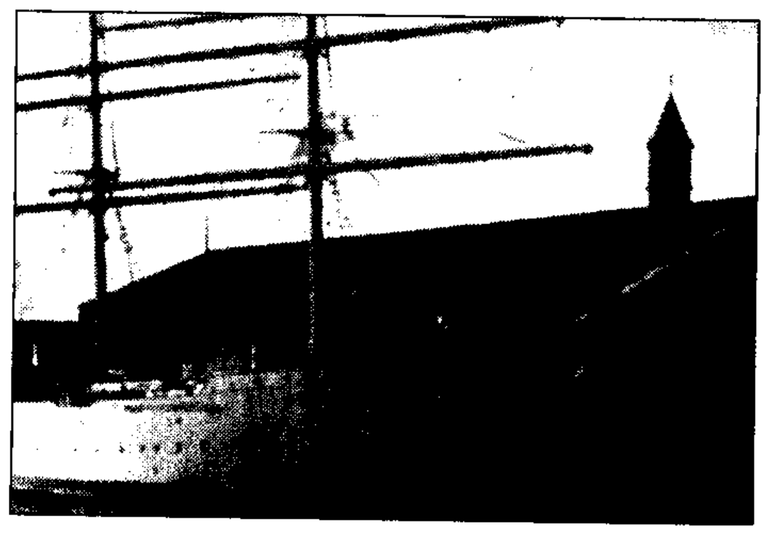
THE news that young offenders are to be electronically tagged to enforce curfew orders will be music to the ears of the UK's burgeoning private "justice" industry.

The electronic monitoring systems are all contracted out privately by region. Premier Prison Services, the company half owned by US Wackenhut Corrections Corporation (see *Eye 1048*) and half by British PFI firm Serco, which holds the contracts to run five prisons in the UK and an asylum detention centre at Dungavel in Lanarkshire as well as prisoner escort services, is one of the major beneficiaries of the government's decision.

Premier is not only contracted to run the electronic tagging systems in London, the Midlands and Wales through its subsidiary Premier Monitoring Services, but it also profits from designing the technology behind tagging through another of it subdivisions, Premier Geografix. Companies like Premier, Securicor which holds the contract for Greater Manchester and Northumbria, and Reliance Monitoring Services, which recently won the contract to provide electronic tagging in Scotland on top of its existing contracts in the Thames Valley and Avon and Somerset, are keen to promote tagging as a cheaper alternative to prison, especially in the light of the recent news that the UK's prison population is about to hit 70,000.

But there is very little evidence to suggest that electronic monitoring prevents reoffending in the long run. Harry Fletcher, assistant general secretary of the National Association of Probation Officers, said in a BBC interview: "I certainly think that tagging is here to stay. But there's still no evidence that it has reduced crime or prevented offenders from committing further offences. What we don't know is what happens to the individual once the tagging period has stopped. My assumption is that a large proportion of them regress."

Stephen Nathan, editor of *Prison Privatisation Report International*, published by the Prison Reform Trust, notes that electronic tagging was first used in North America in the 1980s and describes it as: "A controversial freedom-restricting, home confinement alternative to prison used to monitor, control and/or modify the behaviour of an accused person or sentenced offender". Nathan makes it clear that for the private corrections industry, as it is known in the US, electronic monitoring is just one more extension of a potentially massive and lucrative global market. On its website, Serco, part-owner of Premier Group, states that the "justice" market in the UK alone is worth up to £2.5bn. While Wackenhut, which has been the subject of a series of prison abuse scandals in the US, provides Premier with the expertise on how to run prisons for profit, Serco has an even more valuable asset – its close links with the Labour government. Its vast PFI portfolio in the UK includes railways and hospitals as well as the contract to run the ballistics missile warning system at RAF Fylingdales. Former Enron chairman, Ralph Hodge, who was given a CBE for his services to the gas and power industries, is also a non-executive director of Serco, while Mike Craven, the chief executive of lobbying firm Lexington communications whose clients include Serco, is a former aide to deputy PM John Prescott.



PORTILLO IN A STORM

AS hinted in the last *Eye*, the report of the national audit office (NAO) into the disbanded Teesside development corporation has caused a bit of a sensation, especially in the north-east press.

It should be read closely by all who believe that the country should be run by businessmen and government cronies, as the development corporations were under Thatcher and Co in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The NAO report is a catalogue of incompetence and waste by the corporation. The disclosures include:

- The payments of £1.6m to developers in compensation for developments which never took place.
- The approval, at the corporation's last meeting in 1998, of payments worth £5m, without even telling the New Towns Commission which was left to clear up the mess.
- The systematic shredding of "unnecessary" documents.
- The complete failure to balance the books, even after being paid vast sums in taxpayers' money. Even at the end, when all the extra subsidies had been absorbed, the corporation was still more than £20m in debt.
- The funding of projects that were outside its scope and powers. Most hilarious of these was the story of the Ukrainian training ship Tovarisch (pictured above). Soon after being selected as a possible competitor in the proposed Tall Ships Race sponsored by the corporation, the ship was declared unsafe and was held at Newcastle by the Marine Safety Agency. The corporation then moved the ship to Middlesbrough. Whoops! The Tall Ships fiasco ground to a halt, so the corporation decided to move the ship to Hartlepool. Whoops! The docks there were too shallow, so the Tovarisch had to hang about at public expense at Middlesbrough, until the corporation could dig up enough cash to tow it back to Germany. This whole escapade cost the taxpayer £250,000.

Perhaps the most salutary lesson in the report goes back to 1992. The corporation asked the government for £8.4m to build a new campus building on Teesdale for the University of Durham. The government department turned down the request citing a number of impeccable reasons, including the undeniable fact that the corporation had had far too much public money for the university already.

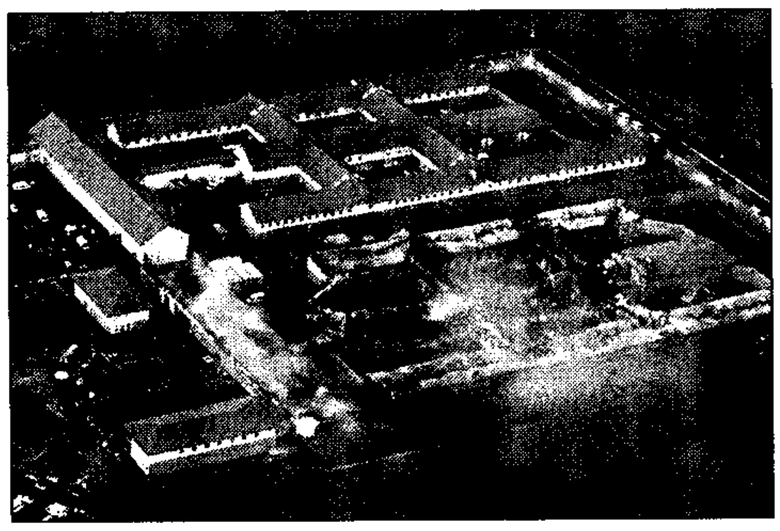
This led to a mighty protest on behalf of the cronies and businessmen on the corporation. If they didn't get the £8.4m, they whined, the reputation of the corporation and the ideas which sustained it would be damaged. Quick as a flash, the minister for local government and the inner cities, that Thatcherite guardian of the public purse Michael Portillo, reversed his decision and stumped up the money for the campus, stating that there would not, in any circumstances, be any further capital or revenue contributions from the government for the university.

Er, not quite. A few months later the government agreed to yet another request for money for the university, this time for a students' amenities building. This cost the taxpayer well over a million pounds.

SPRINKLERS' CUSS

HOME secretary David Blunkett had no doubt about the fire that destroyed the Yarl's Wood detention centre on 14 February. It was all the fault of the detainees.

"I am not prepared," he trumpeted, "to let government policy be determined by those intent on creating disorder and destruction." So keen was he to blame the detainees that he does not appear to have heard some of the questions put to him. For instance, shadow home secretary Oliver Letwin asked of the police and fire services: "Is it true that they had no immediate access when they arrived?" And: "Why was no heed paid to anxieties that my hon friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire, Alistair Burt MP, and unions raised about pressures and tensions in Yarl's Wood?"



Blunkett would not countenance any criticism of the management of the detention centre, run by Group 4. Nor could he give even a half credible answer to anxious questions from his own side about the failure of the authorities to install sprinklers. The *Eye* is happy to provide answers to these questions.

Access during the fire.

In a strongly-worded statement issued very soon after the blaze, the Fire Brigades Union, which is affiliated to the Labour party, complained bitterly that its members, for some time after they arrived at the site, were prevented from going into the building to put out the fire. Individual fire officers have claimed that if they had been allowed access, the fire could have been put out much earlier.

Complaints before the fire.

These were by no means limited to a few cautious statements from Mr Burt. On 8 January human rights campaigner Lord Avebury raised with home office minister Lord Rooker the case of an informant of his in Yarl's Wood who had been victimised. On 15 January a deputation of human rights and refugee organisations went to Yarl's Wood at the invitation of the home office detention user group. The deputation concluded: "The centre felt much more like prison than Harmondsworth. Its regime is harsher and seems to be strictly imposed.

Sprinklers.

On 11 May last year, Barbara Roche, minister of state at the home office, finally wrote to Luton West MP Kelvin Hopkins, who five months earlier had urged the home office to install a sprinkler system at Yarl's Wood. "The issue you raised," she wrote, "is of considerable importance and I fully understand the concerns you have raised. As a result of your representations, I have asked the Prison Service to review fire safety precautions and the use of sprinklers at all detention centres and prison establishments. Decisions about fitting sprinklers at Yarl's Wood and other detention centres will be taken in light of the conclusion of this review."

What happened to that review? Mrs Roche is now an "enforcer" in the cabinet office, and Mr Blunkett could not help MPs about the nature of the review. Mr Hopkins is writing again to find out what happened to it. Meanwhile, now that Yarl's Wood has burnt down at a cost to the public purse of at least £40m, a sprinkler system has been ordered.

PS: Three years ago, after a long series of complaints about conditions at Campsfield detention centre near Oxford, managed by Group 4, a fire broke out at the centre. Five detainees were later prosecuted for causing the fire and were acquitted after the witnesses from Group 4 made fools of themselves in the witness box.

PPS: Group 4 should not claim all the credit for Yarl's Wood. At least some should go to Capita, aka Crapita, another favourite of "new" Labour which helped "procure" the new immigration detention centres for the home office and boasted about it. Back in 2000 it claimed that more than 60 Crapita staff worked on "an unusually tight delivery schedule" for three detention centres, Yarl's Wood, Thurleigh and Harmondsworth.

UP THE SWANICK

JUDGE John Prophet, president of the country's employment tribunals, hit the headlines recently with a stinging protest about the government's plans to run down the scope and frequency of tribunal hearings. But he now has to deal with a rather awkward problem about personal interests at a tribunal for which he is responsible.

Dr Gail Williams, a former lecturer in equine science at De Montfort University, sued her employers for unfair dismissal. She was sacked, she complained, because she occasionally protested about the abysmal level of training among university staff.

The university claimed, among other things, that she had refused to carry out the instructions of her line manager, which she denied. The case was heard over five days last year by the employment tribunal at Leicester, whose chairman is solicitor, John Threlfell. The "employer" member of the tribunal was Mr N. Seddon. The main witness for the university was its pro-chancellor, Professor Brian Swanick.

On the third day of the hearing, as Dr Williams's last witness was being cross-examined, counsel for the university revealed that Mr Seddon knew Professor Swanick. Upon which chairman Threlfell interjected that the tribunal had known this all along, and indeed that he too knew the professor and had been to dinner in his home. This came as a bit of a shock to Dr Williams and her lawyers. The shock became even greater when Mr Seddon blurted out that he also knew the professor.

After a hurried conference Dr Williams and her lawyers reluctantly accepted that, at that late stage in the proceedings, they had no alternative but to continue. Their case, already overwhelming and supported by a large crowd of witnesses, seemed to improve as Prof Swanick was obliged by documentary evidence to concede that much of the university's case did not match the facts.

Dr Williams, her lawyers and her supporters were outraged when, on 20 August, the tribunal decided that although she had been unfairly dismissed, she had "contributed to her dismissal by a factor of 40 percent". This decision about her contribution was "discretionary" and was based on the tribunal's impressions of Dr Williams. It was therefore unlikely to be overturned on appeal. She was awarded £10,465.67 compensation.

In a long letter to Judge Prophet, Dr Williams complains about Mr Threlfell's failure to disclose his personal connection with Prof Swanick at the start of the hearing. She emphasised that had she known about the connection then, she would have asked for an independent chairman. Judge Prophet has acknowledged the letter but has not yet replied to it.

MMR:

HOMESPUN ADVICE?

WHENEVER a newspaper reports on the latest development in the MMR controversy, concerned mother and GP Dr Penelope Elphinstone seems to enter the debate via the letters page.

Since 1999 and in newspapers from the *Observer* to the *Express*, *Sunday Times*, *Guardian* and *Independent* she has been expressing outrage that legal aid has been granted to the many children said to have been damaged by the triple jab.

"This unsubstantiated health scare and the litigation are mutually sustaining: they endanger children, enrich lawyers and impoverish the health service," she declares. But then she would say that, wouldn't she? The man who shares her north London home is one Anthony Barton, solicitor and doctor who just happens to be advising Aventis Pasteur – one of the defending pharmaceutical giants in the forthcoming MMR legal action

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW- UP...

■ **EXPORT CREDIT:** Vivian Brown (left), chief executive of the export credit guarantee department (ECGD), protests in the last *Eye* about a piece in these pages (*Eye* 1047) about Liz Airey, who chairs the ECGD advisory group and is a director of the construction group Amec.

Amec is seeking a £68m government guarantee from the ECGD to cover construction of the controversial Yusefeli dam in Turkey. Mr Brown complained that the ECGD advisory council does not advise on prospective projects, but he didn't say what the council is there for. A press release in July 2000 defined the council's new role as "to advise on the underlying policies and principles which ECGD needs to follow in order to achieve its new mission, particularly how ECGD should take account of the wider impact of projects..."

The minutes of the advisory council meeting on 12 December, attended by Airey, plainly demonstrate that the council did discuss specific projects including the Ilisu dam. The minutes emphasised the following passage: "In discussion of the Ilisu dam, the council also noted that the business principles should help rather than hinder a similar case were it to arise in future." Could this have been a veiled reference to the Yusefeli project?

Either way the appointment as chair of the advisory council of an oil consultant who sits on the board and has a substantial shareholding in a major construction company with an obvious interest in the decisions of the ECGD is plainly of itself a matter of public interest, not to say concern.

■ **GURPAL VIRDI:** At a special ceremony in Scotland Yard on 20 February, presided over by assistant commissioner Bernard Hogan-Howe, police sergeant Gurpal Virdi was presented with an award for "outstanding level of support to the victims of an unprovoked knife attack" in west London in 1998. Mr Virdi's role in the attack was described in detail in *Eye* 968 and was followed by a systematic attack on his integrity masterminded by his colleagues in the Metropolitan police.

Mr Virdi has received substantial damages from the police and is back working with them. His detailed complaints were referred by the police complaints authority (PCA) to the West Midlands police. A senior West Midlands officer rang Mr Virdi and suggested to him that if in the course of the inquiry into his complaints there was any evidence that he himself had broken disciplinary rules, he, Virdi, would have to be disciplined.

Not surprisingly Mr Virdi told the PCA he would not cooperate with West Midlands police, and his complaints have now been referred to officers from South Wales.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

JUST as Jersey has sought to remove its septic isle image by signing up for the new greater transparency necessary to avoid being blacklisted by the world's richest nations, Britain's number one home grown offshore tax haven has been hit by involvement in yet another dirty money scandal.

It has emerged that Pakistan's former naval chief chose Jersey as his haven for a large slice of the millions he pocketed in bribes from military contracts.

Up to £8m is understood to have been located in Jersey bank accounts linked to Mansur ul-Haq, extradited from the United States to Pakistan last year on corruption charges.

Standard Chartered and Dresdner Bank – the old Kleinwort Benson part – are said to be those whose Jersey branches were discovered to have had the former admiral's money. Ul-Haq was sacked in 1997 after allegations of massive kickbacks over a $90m deal for three French submarines.

In a January plea bargain ul-Haq agreed to repay $7.5m from the bribes he received from French companies who sold submarines and missiles to the Pakistan navy while he was chief of staff from 1994. He has already handed over $6m, some of which came from the Jersey accounts.

The former admiral was one of the high profile targets of the Pakistan's anti-corruption National Accountability Bureau established after the military coup which overthrew prime minister Nawaz Sharif – ironically the man who sacked ul-Haq.

The ul-Haq affair is one more embarrassment for Jersey as it struggles with the impossible: to persuade the world, and particularly the financial action task force (FATF) of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation & Development, that it is not a full service offshore centre for hot money.

It follows the legal and diplomatic row over the freezing of £100m found at Standard Chartered linked to the foreign minister of the government of Qatar. This money is believed possibly to include commissions on defence deals by the small oil rich Gulf emirate involving among others British Aerospace.

The irony here is that the Qatari government has no problem about these payments, only with the investigation by the Jersey authorities. Ruling families in the Gulf from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on down see such offshore accounts as part of their feudal *droit de seigneur*. The emir of Qatar is said to be upset that such largesse to one of his underlings should be a matter for vulgar exposure and questioning. After all, the only crime is to take more than is appropriate to your station.

This has created a problem in Jersey because of the split response of the British government to the disclosure of the £100m, with the treasury and home office on one side, and the ministry of defence and foreign office on the other. Chancellor Gordon Brown is eager for all the UK havens to come off the FATF blacklist especially after 11 September; and with the home office (which liaises with the self-governing Channel Islands and the Isle of Man on behalf of the crown and wields ultimate legislative power) he has backed the Jersey inquiry. This has been opposed by the MoD (representing the merchants of death) and the FO (representing our friendly sons of the desert).

Just how this matter will be resolved is unclear, especially as American companies may also be involved and it is a criminal offence to make payments to officials of foreign governments. It is rumoured that the emir has been lobbying "Dubya" – on the basis that Qatar is a staunch ally in the war against terror (not surprising as offshore bank accounts belonging to Gulf rulers inflame Muslim radicals) – not to investigate too deeply.

And Qatar follows on the role of Jersey in the looting of funds from Nigeria and Russia, not to mention involvement in laundering the proceeds of drugs, robberies and fraud. And now it is suggested that the Channel Islands, which usually

*"If you're **not** going to smoke, kindly do it outside"*

means Jersey when it comes to banks, may have helped Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and his crew to hide their share of that country's much diminished wealth and the diamond pay-offs for supporting civil war in the former Zaire.

No wonder, therefore, Jersey is eager to escape the blacklist or that it was placed on it in the first place by the FATF in 2000 along with such havens of probity as Liechtenstein, Panama, Liberia and the Cook Islands.

But there is an increasing feeling in the septic isle that time may be running out for the financial services business that has made many local lawyers, accountants and bankers, not to mention politicians, very rich over the last 30 years but done somewhat less for the majority of the islanders. Jersey cannot afford to be seen as a second class or outlaw haven specialising in only brass plate banks and "see no evil" company formation agents. Yet if it gives the FATF, and particularly the US, what it wants – total transparency and cooperation in investigations – then a huge slice of its offshore deposits and business will go elsewhere, just like the tourists have done. That business will go either to the less reputable havens or to those such as Luxembourg and Switzerland who are prepared to take a tougher line in resisting OECD demands.

Critics of the present regime in Jersey point to the Scottish castles, Mallorcan villas and Mediterranean yachts awaiting leading figures in the financial services industry when the boom finally busts. Expatriate workers who have most of the top posts will simply transfer to similar jobs elsewhere. But where that will leave the local population and many jobs other than gone is far from clear.

Present sky high property prices would be hard to maintain without the cheap mortgages given to financial sector employees. That could create a major credit problem for local banks if those jobs went. Lower earnings from the financial sector would also jeopardise a budget which is already heading into deficit due to the burden of supporting an ever growing public sector. Last week saw the admission that the island's health service was in crisis just like the NHS.

Prior to the attack on the World Trade Center towers the Bush administration was opposed to the OECD crackdown on tax havens. Right-wing libertarians saw it as a blow to privacy and the right to evade taxes. As a result Jersey and other premiership havens under British auspices such as the Cayman Islands and Bermuda felt suddenly confident that the good days would continue. But now Uncle Sam has made it clear that he expects every country to assist the hunt for terrorist cash or face the consequences. So now there is a rush to join the "good guys". But the cost of compliance with ever-tightening "know your customer" rules is starting to eat into, if not entirely devour, the former juicy profits from holding hot money for dictators, corrupt officials, drug traffickers and tax evaders.

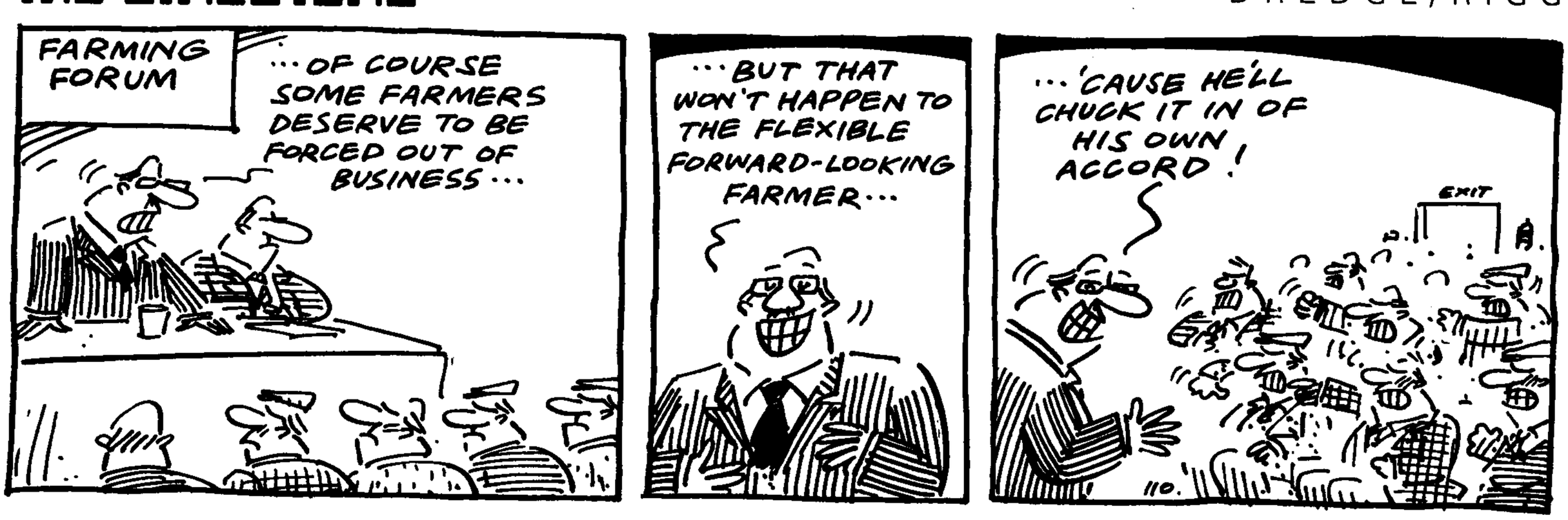
The price for many of the havens like Jersey could be eventual extinction of their financial sectors. And for many – especially those British governed islands in the Caribbean sun – that is all there really is outside tourism. That is not the case in Jersey, but finance is the major island earner, unlike in Switzerland.

No matter how much Jersey and other havens seek to portray the legitimate nature of their shady business – handling money for expatriates living or working abroad – the simple truth is that the sole reason for their existence is to hide money from somebody. If it's companies – usually multinational groups – then it is at best tax avoidance. If it is individuals, it is usually tax evasion more than avoidance or hiding assets from wives, business partners, inquisitive fellow citizens or the police.

The rich countries have finally had enough. Huge pressure is being applied to the recalcitrant "respectable" such as the Caymans and Bermuda, which are heavily reliant on US corporate business for their tax schemes and captive insurers. Just how hardball a game the US can play was shown when it arrested the owner of a Cayman bank and persuaded him to hand over thousands of client files to avoid a lengthy prison term.

While maintaining it is business as usual in public there are signs that Jersey politicians are starting to provide for a less financially certain future. Relaxing the credentials required to live there is just one straw in the wind blowing up the English Channel. The game for havens like Jersey could soon be up unless they want to join the tiny islands of the South Pacific and lawless states like Liberia on the outer fringes of offshore finance.

FUND manager Schroders may have plunged to a loss last year but there is still plenty of the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Stock Horror

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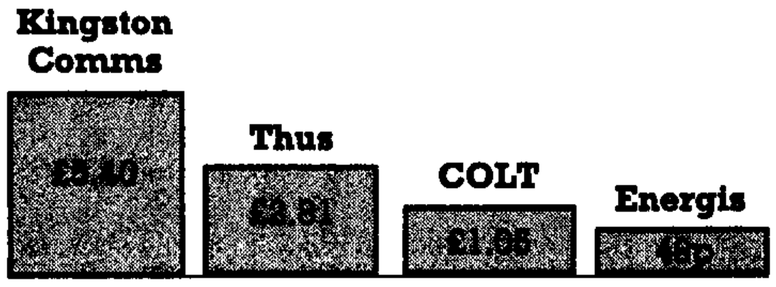


good life to go round.

A January trip to India, for example, which saw two days of shopping, sightseeing and more shopping in Jodhpur with rests taken at the world's biggest art deco palace where rooms start at £200 a night.

WITH Arthur Andersen, aka Andersen, it is hard not to laugh at the accountants' view of themselves as distinct from the reality even before Enron. Consider this blurb put out last year by the UK partnership soliciting clients eager to avoid "fraud and integrity risk".

"We can offer a high degree of independence, know how and professionalism that enables us to be seen as a trusted adviser… Being fully conversant with the rules of evidence we can take care not to corrupt evidence or prejudice any future civil, criminal or regulatory action." No doubt exactly what Andersen had in mind when it began shredding Enron documents!

"Andersen's financial crime vulnerability assessment helps organisations identify any weak links… Our surveys establish aspects of organisational culture which mitigate or facilitate financial crime… This helps to pinpoint gaps and risks and to establish and reinforce a corporate culture that supports financial integrity." Like at Enron where Andersen failed to stop Ken Lay and his buddies hiding losses and debts while pocketing millions in share deals.

"Our expertise in assessing vulnerability derives from many years of hands-on experience of high profile financial crime investigations." Such as in De Lorean, Tomkins, Waste Management, Sunbeam, Baptist Foundation of Arizona and Australia's very own Enron, HIH Group.

"By recognising your organisation's financial crime risks and managing them effectively you will reduce your exposure to significant losses from fraud, money laundering, market abuse and corruption. Proactive preventative action helps protect your organisation's assets and reputation in the eyes of customers, regulators and stakeholders." Andersen's complicity at Enron in not doing so helps explain why it is trying to buy its way out of jail with an offer of $1bn to Enron creditors.

For as Andersen points out: "High profile and embarrassing loss from financial crime are not in anyone's best interests."

'Slicker'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The governor of the Bank of England yesterday played down hopes of an imminent upturn in the global economy."

— Financial Times, Saturday 23 February 2002.

"The governor of the Bank of England yesterday gave a bullish verdict on the global economy, casting doubt on weak UK retail sales figures and giving an optimistic assessment of the US and Europe."

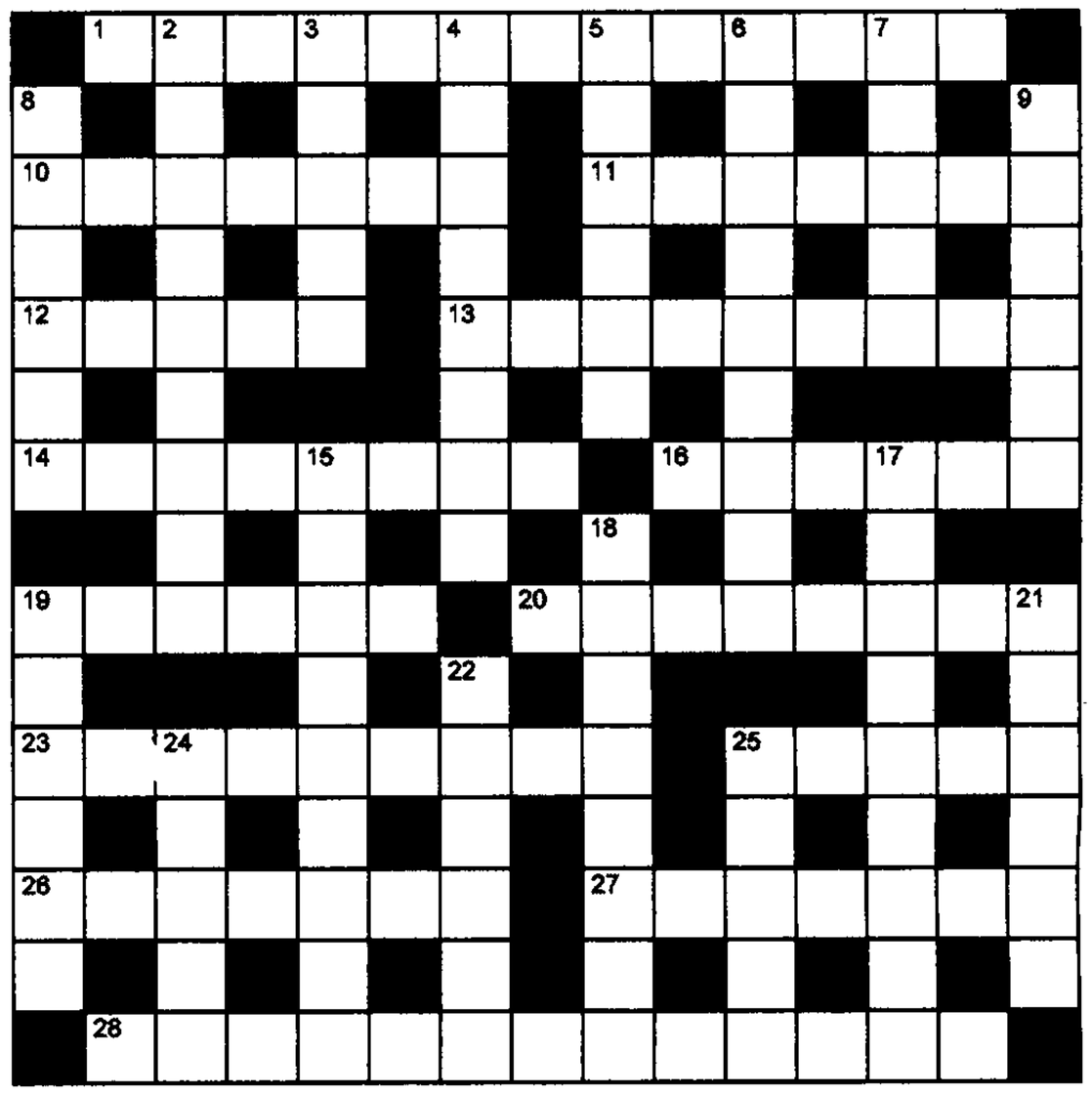
The Independent, Saturday 23 February 2002.

EYE CROSSWORD 204

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 15 March 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Tend to have Jack and Jill behave promiscuously left and right (5,4,4)

10 Pretty quick getting erect member during toe manipulation (2-5)

11 Cyclops would have one in the morning with popular exiled leader (3,4)

12 The characteristic morality of those screwing around (5)

13 Imagine having recently coupled with Caprice ... (4,5)

14 ... skimpy top ... boner ... shaft (4,4)

16 Cheese's said to give you wind (6)

19 Row of tits, London direction (4-2)

20 Filthy beast pairing Sooty with Snoopy (5,3)

23 Awkward, having only members that oppose (3,6)

25 Johnson's Baby Oil tops when applied to erection (no climax, though) (5)

26 Thus one flipping gets messy foam "overcoat" by mobster (7)

27 It serves to take the piss out of Arthur English (7)

28 To foreigners, light touching of balls is an early stage of foreplay (6,7)

DOWN

2 The likes of the PCC puts *Guardian* bottom of broadsheets (9)

3 Ruined guarantors will never hurt you, the saying goes (5)

4 "Can't be arsed with tasks," repeated head (4,4)

5 Emin's initial meeting with colleague: "Need a drink" (6)

6 Be patient when it comes to sex, as the drill sergeant says? (4,3,2)

7 Country yokel's first to come topless (5)

8 Exquisite detective casually mounts bishop (6)

9 Frenzy means restraining catalyst (6)

15 Feel depressed? Score! (9)

17 Natural drug gets De Niro pissed outside pub at midday (9)

18 Flower girl married to, yes, French outside right (8)

19 Half pissed and he scored (6)

21 Rattler having fun with hippie's thing (6)

22 Pet school gets low entry (6)

24 He's been given a long time to get biography right (5)

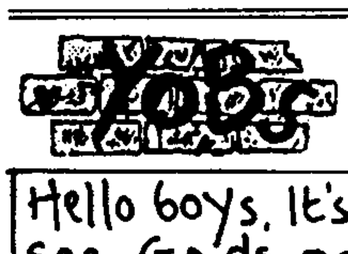
25 Makes piss poor Serb start to whinge inside (5)

Crossword 203 winner: RORY KEHOE

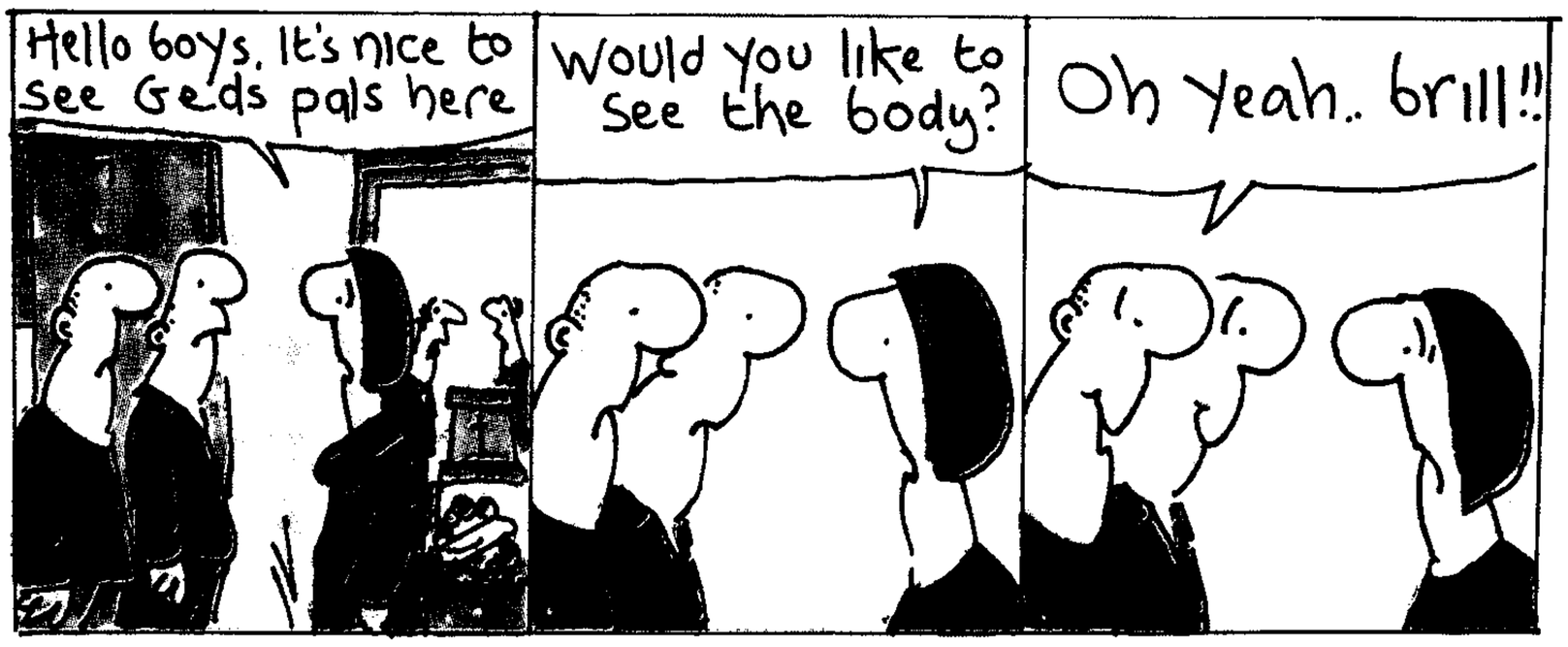
Solution to Crossword 203

ACROSS: 1 Venom 4 Fatal blow 9 Shiatsu 10 Open war 11 Spaghetti 12 Squat 13/27 Golden Jubilee 14 Vendetta 17 Soft soap 22 Reign 24 Murder rap 26 Tedious 28 Sex kitten 29 Rocks.

DOWN: 1 Vests 2 Naipaul 3 Matchless 4/19 Fourth estate 5 Two-timer 6 Leeds 7 Law suit 8 Worst-case 13 Gastritis 15 Dismember 16 Marmoset 18 FT Index 20 Acrylic 21 Trojan 23 Naomi 25 Peers.



HUSBAND



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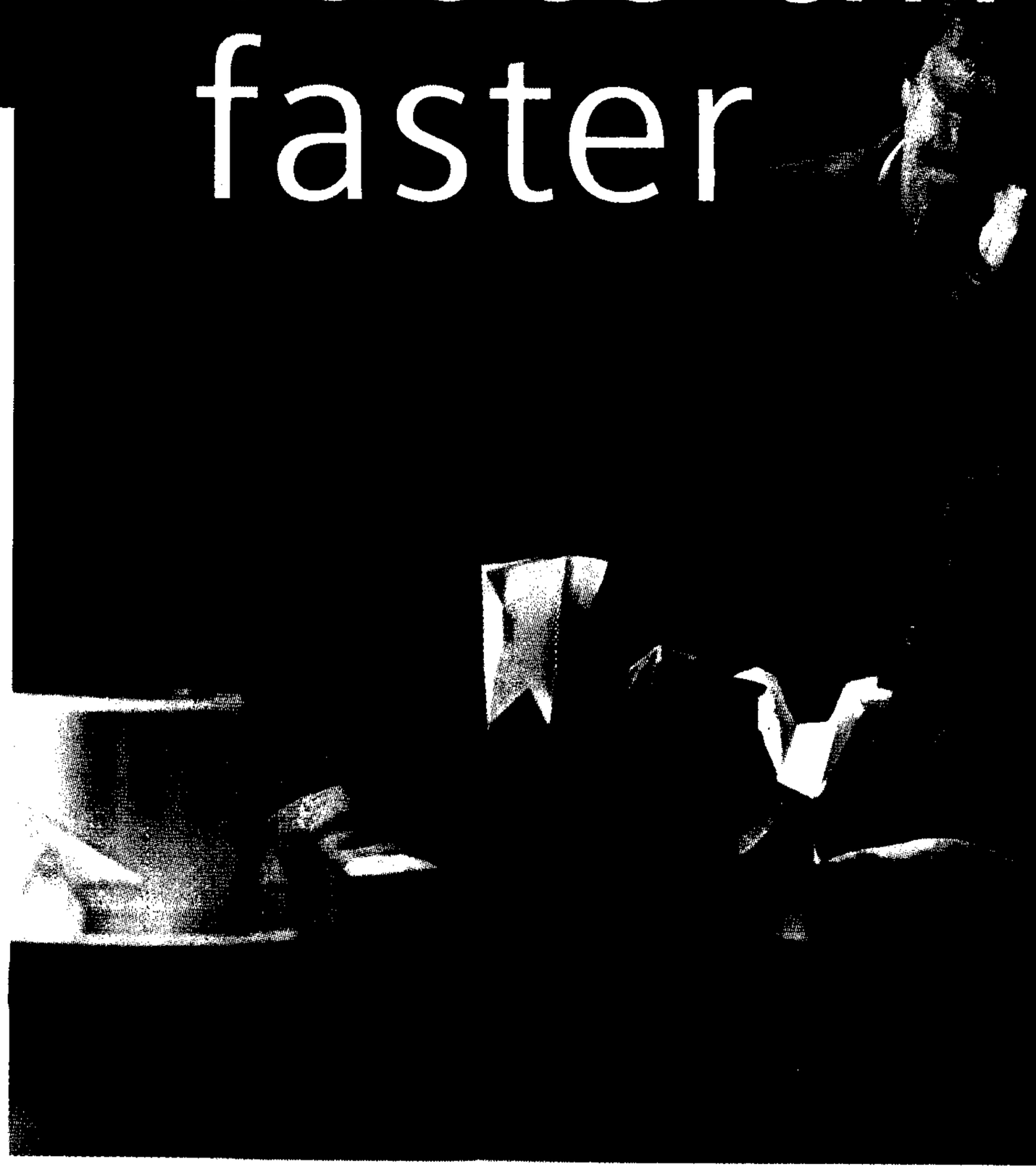

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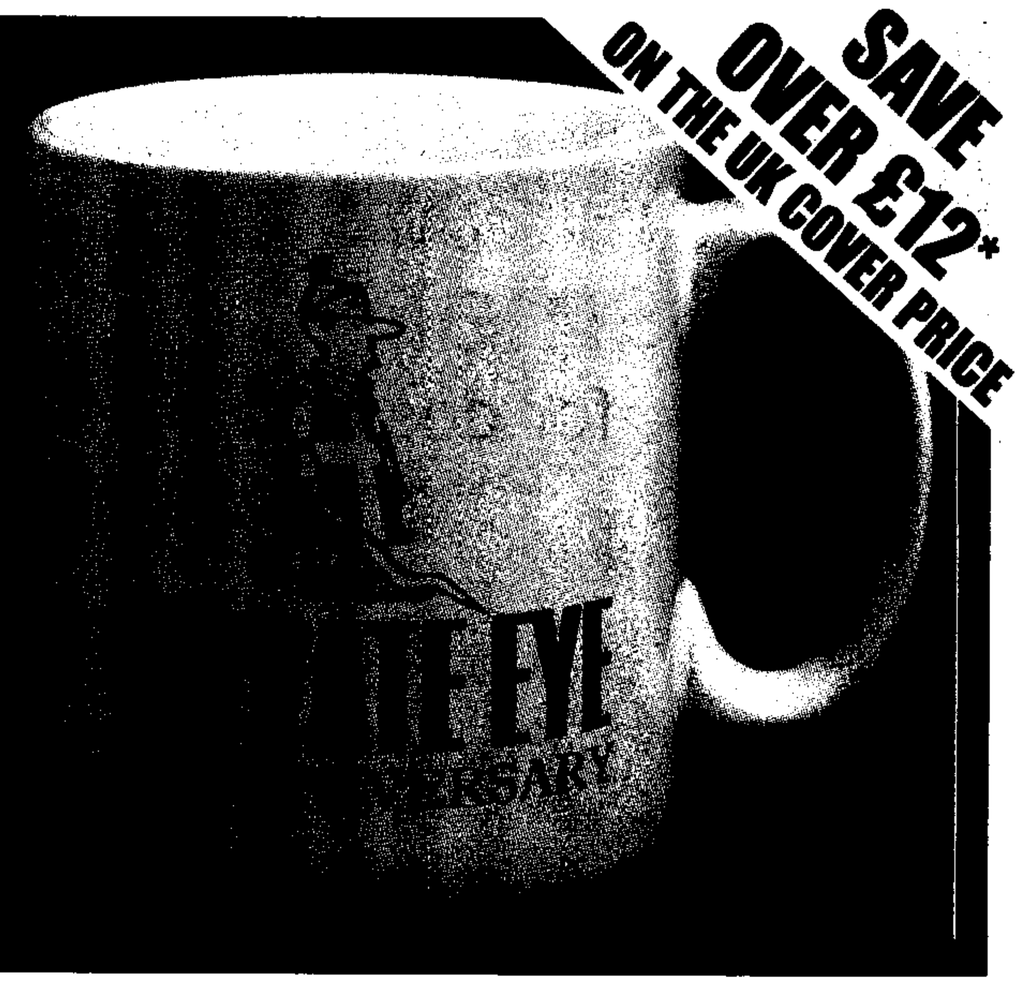

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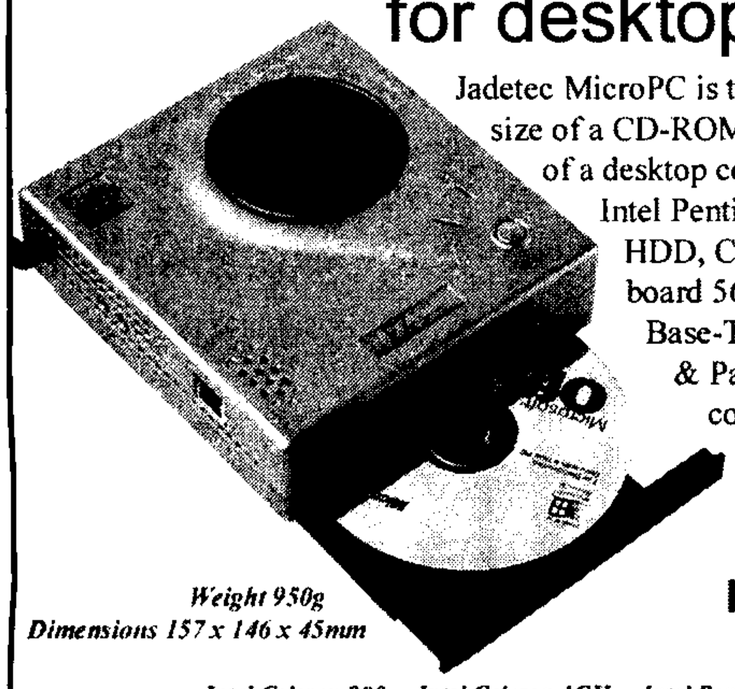

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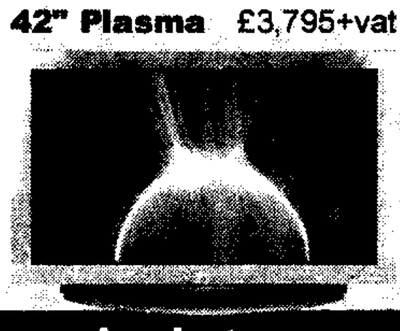

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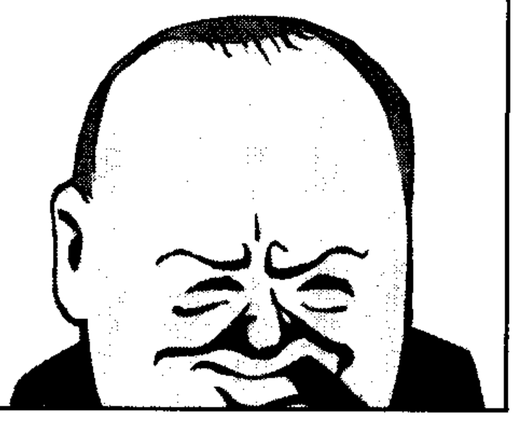

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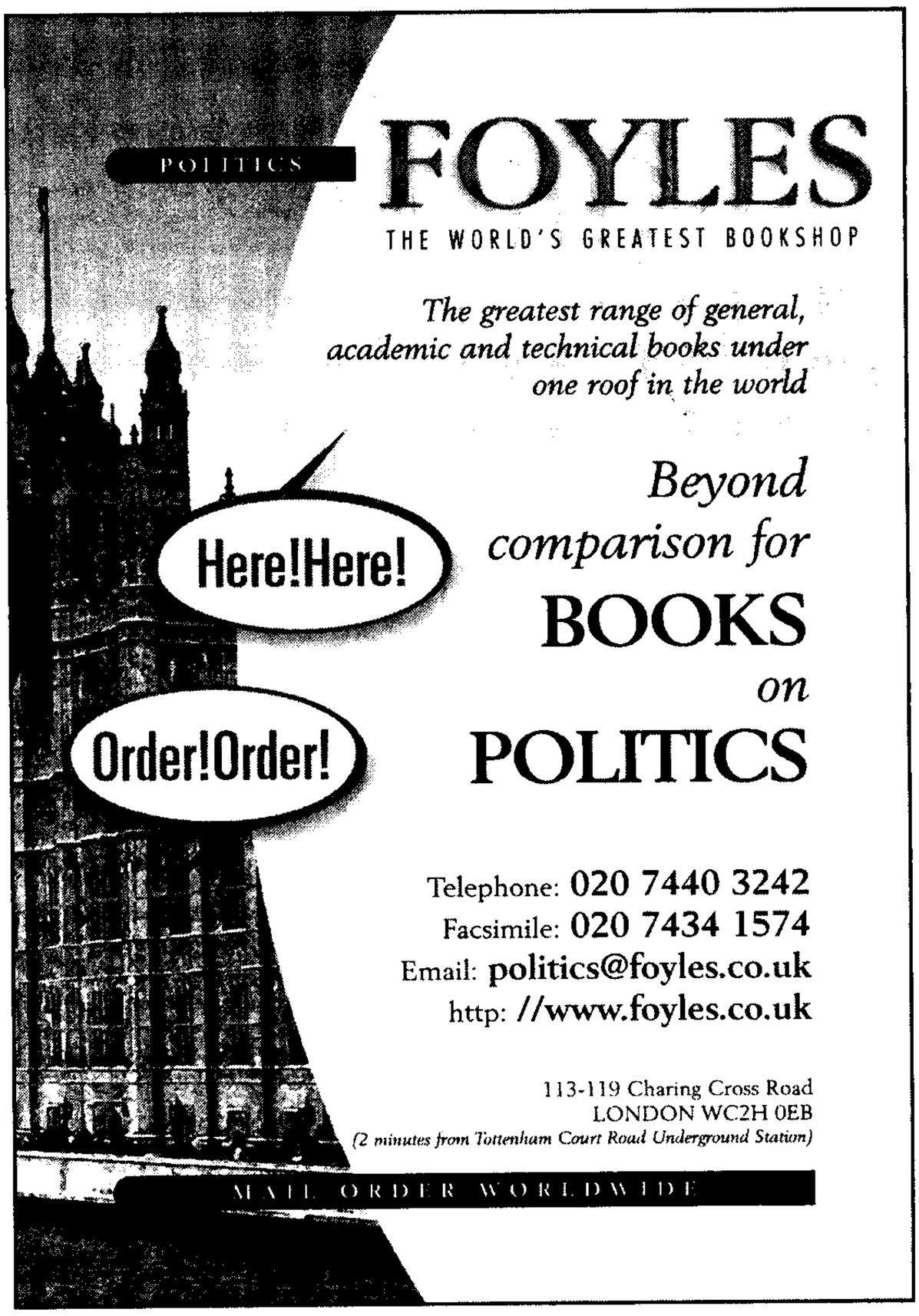

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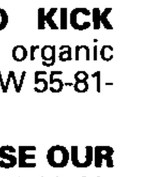

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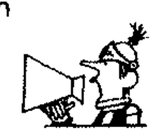

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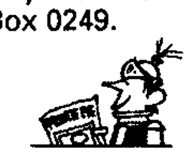

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